Surprise US rate cut lifts Asian markets

TOKYO—MOST ASIAN MARKETS REbounded on Wednesday, reversing their recent gut-wrenching plunge as investors welcomed a hefty surprise interest rate cut by the US Federal Reserve to shore up the sagging American economy.

European markets, however, dropped sharply—a sign that the rate cut might not be enough to restore investor confidence, which has been badly shaken by worries about the longer-term health of the US economy.

SURPRISE / A-3

METRO / A19

Ex-Batangas Gov. Leviste testifies on shooting aide in self-defense, breaks down

BUSINESS / B1

Cebu Pacific stops international road show for P6.84-B IPO

WORLD / A22

'Brokeback Mountain' star found dead in New York apartment

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS
Thursday, January 24, 2008 | 44 Sections | Vol. 22 / No. 46 | P18 | www.inquirer.net

US recession expected to hit RP economy hard

By Gaelan L. Lucas

FRANCO LEVILLE IS NOT EXACTLY A MAN who would instantly say "panic," even if he says he feels his poverty, especially of late.

"Life is more difficult now," said Leville, 34, who works for the Makati Public Safety department (Mapsa), while waiting to avail

BUSINESS / B-1

GMA: 'Our economy is booming'

By TJ Burgonio

ZURICH, SWITZERLAND—AFTER hearing "economic fundamentals," the Philippines would weather a world financial crunch, President Macapagal-Arroyo said yesterday.

The President aired this position outlook in a speech before the Swiss-Asian Chamber of Commerce (SACC) here even as she made a pitch that the country remained a favorable investment destination amid the global uncertainties.

"Our economy is booming," she

GMA / A-8 & 9

IN SEARCH of more investments, President Arroyo addresses the Swiss-Asian Chamber of Commerce at the Savoy Hotel in Zurich soon after arriving there Tuesday night (Wednesday morning in Manila). She leaves for the old resort of Davos by train

POSITIVE SIGN Bronze bull is Wall Street's symbolic sculpture for the good times in the market. Here's hoping for a return of a bullish run.

PNP hit for witch-hunt

Traders told to tap OFW skills, not foreigners'

By Margaux C. Ortiz

THEIR SKILLS ARE SOUGHT IN some of the world's most complex economies, but when they come home, these overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) engage in businesses far from their expertise and waste real talent.

The common lament is that there are just no opportunities here, or if there are, little is known about the places where these engineers and technicians may fit in.

TRADERS TOLD TO TAP / A-4

NOV. 29, 2007. (PNP) GMA'y Dasa during interviewing Marine Capt. Nicanor Faeldon! Or, are they pleading his escape? Are they conspiring to overthrow the government? How can you tell? Does this video constitute enough evidence to prosecute Dasa ! Is this all? Who knows?

Faeldon-reporter tape does not show much

By Alcuin Papa and Nikko Dizon

THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL POLICE CAME UNder fire yesterday for allegedly engaging in a witch-hunt in an attempt to justify a tough stand against journalists reporting on coups and other crisis situations and deflect criticism that its move infringed on press freedom.

After weeks of insinuating that a female journalist helped Marine Capt. Nicanor Faeldon escape during the Peninsula Manila standoff last Nov. 29, the PNP finally looked to the to produce the name of the alleged culprit while officially withholding confirmation.

Two PNP officers, who spoke on condition of anonymity, claimed Tuesday that Dasa Ilaw, a reporter of the Tokyo-based news agency Jiji Press, had provided broadcast audio exposing until now that he allegedly used it to slip out of the hotel.

The officers said that she ate of the woman with a curly hair was captured in news footage taken by a crew of the suspended television network BPSLA.

However, a clip provided the

PNP HIT / A-10

Daughter seeks amparo for jailed mom, missing dad

By Leila B. Salaverria

WITH HER MOTHER IN JAIL AND HER father missing for nearly a year now, Lorna Santos has taken up the legal battle to free them and protect their rights.

Santos, 23, yesterday filed before the Court of Appeals a petition for the writs of habeas corpus and amparo on behalf of her parents, Elizabeth Principio and Leo Velasco, who, she said, were abducted and detained by police and military officials last year.

She asked the appellate court to direct the police and military officials to produce her parents before the court in good health and to stop the tension for keeping them in detention.

She also asked the court to order the police and military officials to disclose her father's whereabouts, and to stop them from further harming her parents.

Principio and Velasco are reported to be members of the National Democratic Front, the political arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

In a statement, the group Bayaning and Desaparecidos said Principio had been transferred from the custodial center to Camp Crame in Quezon, Bocos for

They said the transfer was made at 11:45 p.m. on Jan. 23, the eve of the filing of Santos' petition.

"Kampanya and Desaparecidos condemn in the strongest term the illegal transfer of political prisoner Elizabeth Principio from the custodial center in Camp Crame to Camden, Bocos Sur," the two groups said.

DAUGHTER SEEKS AM / A-6

Year of Rat lucky for GMA, says feng shui master

By Tina Arceo-Dumlao

LADY LUCK IS LIKELY TO SMILE on Malacañang and its tenant in the coming Year of the Earth Rat.

According to Joseph Chan, master feng shui consultant of Mandarin Oriental, the most resonant of Malacañang Palace, the southeast where the "power points" are, will be the star in the coming year, which is the Chinese calendar starts Feb. 7.

Chan said in a briefing yesterday that the presence of the "lucky star" means good for more for the Palace and the most occupant, President Macapagal-Arroyo.

"If Malacañang is lucky, then its occupant should be lucky, too," Chan said.

He advised the President, however, to pay close attention to her health because of the

YEAR OF RAT / A-5

Laguna farmers to do a Sumilao: Marching on foot to Manila

By Jovanie Aning

TAKING A LEAF FROM THE FARMERS who walked to Manila from Sumilao, Bukidnon, to press their claim to a 144-hectare property, a peasant group calling itself the Hacienda Yulo Farmers' Association (Hayfa) is preparing to travel on foot from Laguna to plead its case to the government.

The Hayfa, with about 500 members, comes from the old Hacienda Yulo that once straddled parts of Calamba City and the towns of Cabuyao, Sta. Rosa and Biñan in Laguna. It is seeking a stop to the conversion of the land it is claiming into subdivisions, golf courses and commercial establishments.

The group gained the support of a

LAGUNA / A2

THAT DELIVERY: Adjacent to the heavily armored Palace, the St. Jude of Thaddeus Archdiocesan Shrine Parish is swamped with people on Wednesday when Fr. Fernando Suarez says Mass and holds a healing session for sick lovers. He goes up to the parish balcony to convince healing with holy water. Below, a woman holds up a phone at a shop for it to receive a drop or two of holy water. (Story on Page 6A.)

WEATHER FORECAST

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Palace defends appointments

JDV to Comelec: Automate

SPEAKER JOSE DE VENE-cia yesterday challenged the Commission on Elections to follow the lead of the House of Representatives in implementing an automated system of voting for the national and local elections in 2010.

The House is at the final stages of installing a P28 million (or $607,913 dollars in earlier reports), automated voting and tabulation system for congressmen and mayors, various participants said.

"We have set a good example that I hope would push the implementation of automated elections in 2010," De Venecia said of the House's biometrics-based system.

He reiterated he said the House electronic voting system would "put psychological pressure on the Comelec to implement before the 2010 national elections the full computerization of Philippine elections to ensure their integrity."

Perhaps, we can as well gather along with members of civil society to address their concerns on automated elections in Malaya," De Venecia said.

'Moral revolution'

De Venecia said automated elections in the House and automated elections in the country in 2010 are the "first features" of a "moral revolution."

The Speaker earlier called on the Arroyo administration to adopt a list of anti-corruption and justice-building measures that he dubbed as his proposal for a moral revolution program.

To pave the way for electronic voting and attendance systems in the House, the plenary hall's floor was raised six inches and covered with 30 km by 30 cm concrete tiles with metal supports. Underneath runs a network of electrical wires and communication cables necessary for the operation of the system's software.

Each House member will be provided with a fingerprint-activated biometric electronic voting gadget, to be used in the voting and roll call. Each vote will be tallied and shown to four giant LCD television screens in the plenary where the yes votes will be color-coded green, red for no votes, and dark gray for abstain. See story this section.

WHAT'S INSIDE

CHR PROBER probed for gun-toting /A7

TRUCE before peace talks, gov't tells Reds /A9

TOO MANY RP cities, mayors complain /A6

Ermita says GMA execs are qualified

By Christine O. Avendaño

MALACAÑANG YESTERDAY DEFENDED PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo's choice of political appointees following criticisms by outgoing Civil Service Commission chair Karina David that the Chief Executive had abused her prerogative on government appointees and was to blame for the politicization and unprofessionalism of the bureaucracy.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said the Administration Code allows President Arroyo to "choose people who could help her implement programs."

But Ermita conceded that "no matter how noisy from the fact that political considerations are used as a basis for appointment but not without a reason."

"Many of the political appointees are qualified and are in a position because of their experience to be able to do the jobs in the offices or agencies they are appointed," he said at the world's press briefing.

He pointed out that President Arroyo has at present 13 Cabinet members who were former congressmen, and one was a senator.

Ermita said the President chooses people whom she could depend on and trust to be able to do their job and delivers.

Ready for questions

The fact that things are moving and projects are not delayed or hampered were proof that President Arroyo designated people who were qualified, according to Ermita.

On reports that the Palace would be investigated by Congress because of David's allegations, he said the Palace would be ready to answer their questions.

David had criticized Mr Arroyo for having the highest number of presidential appointees, 66 percent of whom were ineligible for the posts.

Senate President Manny Villar called President Arroyo "insecure" for filling up sensitive positions in government with her political allies and hoped that they genuinely qualify for "positional" service.

In an interview with dzMM radio, Villar said: "I think that (choosing only loyal, albeit unqualified, allies) is necessarily because if, in that case, you're afraid of being surrounded by intelligent persons or persons not loyal to you. Political survival is the primary concern in appointing individuals in the government."

Villar said a mark of a true leader was the ability to get people from other camps on your side. "Loyalty can be earned from people around you when they see how good you are as a leader and how good you are in your work. You will get their loyalty over time. I believe it's simplistic and brute politics if a leader just moves to win the loyalty of those around him or her," said Villar.

Bloated bureaucracy

Villar said he was not fond of bringing his own people whenever he gets into a new office because he believes in working with the people already in the organization.

To solve the bloated bureaucracy, Villar suggested that the CSC give department heads more flexibility to remove lazy and non-productive appointees that have accumulated in the bureaucracy.

For his part, Sen. Pimentel Lecnen said: "It's hard to professionalize the government bureaucracy until certain political considerations will stop. We compromise integrity and qualification in governmental appointments. The bureaucracy is not only bloated but it is also bloated by morons and mercenaries who do anything but stand up to Mrs. Arroyo." *With a report from* Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

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Arrests preempted new plot – Esperon

By Nikko Dizon

THE MILITARY MAY HAVE preempted attempts to overthrow the government with the latest last week of five discharged elite Scout Rangers soldiers who were implicated in a post-destabilization coup attempt, military chief Gen. Hermogenes Esperon Jr. said yesterday.

"We might have preempted some moves or [maybe] they are really that weak and so that's my basis for saying that we are now the beneficiaries of an identification attempts are unmasked," Esperon told reporters in Camp Aguinaldo.

The arrests of the former Scout Rangers "was a very clear indication that there were a movement of [former]," Esperon added.

Two of the five arrested men were later released since there was no probable cause to file charges of illegal possession of firearms against them.

The former Scout Rangers were among the 40 enlisted personnel who were detained for more than a year at Camp Capinpin in Tanay, Rizal without formal charges as an investigation for their alleged participations in the failed February 2006 coup plot.

They were discharged from military service last year.

But their superiors are facing a court martial, and remain detained in the Army stockade in Fort.

Esperon said the military was aware that the arrested former soldiers "are being orchestrated by somebody higher than them."

Asked if the coup plotters are only lying low after the arrests, Esperon said: "I do not want to tell you that. I can see the whole picture. From my point, from where I sit, we have neutralized them. There's a big effort on them when we get them."

MANILA

Priest killer free to go – Gonzalez

THERE IS NO MORE LEGAL IMPEDIMENT to the release of convicted priest killer Wenceslao Mesaros, according to Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez.

But Gonzalez said he wanted to formalize his decision by putting it in writing. The order could come out today, he said.

"As of that time, I cannot find any more reason [to hold him]. But I want to put [the order] in proper form so that if misleading questions [the release], it's there," Gonzalez told reporters.

He said the last issue he resolved was whether ousted President Joseph Estrada had the authority to cancel a commutation order of Estrada's predecessor, President Fidel Ramos.

Ramos ordered Mesaros's 40-year sentence commuted to 24 years in 1998.

Based on his reading of past court decisions, Gonzalez said the commutation of the sentence cannot be reversed.

"In my mind, that cannot be done anymore because the commutation extended by Ramos has already been completed. And jurisprudence holds that once the commutation, pardon or parole has already been completed, it cannot be recalled," he said.

He said Mesaros had not committed any violations of prison rules.

The justice secretary also noted that during a meeting he had with the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, one bishop had expressed disbelief at the story that Mesaros had eaten the brain of the Italian priest. Tullio Favali whom Mesaros was convicted of killing.

Another bishop also said he was not opposing Mesaros's release, Gonzalez said.

Mesaros also had health problems, he said.

The 62-year-old Mesaros has been in jail since 1985, when he was arrested for Favali's murder.

Earlier reports pegged Mesaros's release date in Jan. 30, but the release did not push through because Gonzalez said he was still studying the convict's records.

Gonzalez said he was being careful as he did not want a repeat of the incident with convicted rapist Hubert Jabaja, whose Dec. 26 release was scuttled after a review of his records by the justice department. Leila B. Salaverria

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2 MONTHS

"I didn't expect I would become overweight. But during my pregnancy, sanayan nag-ko-kolong yung baby ko, no! I was eating pero nagpi-pregnancy ako. I didn't think of the consequences of eating too much. I felt bad and conscious of how I looked. My waistline went up to 31.5 inches. Imagine, regina-model pa ako dati. Then suddenly I couldn't find anything nice to wear. So, I started treatments at Marie France. In just a month I had already lost a lot and now after two months my waist is down to 27 inches! I've even been told 'O, payat ka na pala ah' by friends. I'm not only flattered, I feel more confident too. I like going out more now, because I can wear the clothes that I couldn't wear before. Thanks to Marie France, I got my body back!"

- Carlene Aguilar, Beauty Queen

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A Brotherhood of Leaders: One Vision, One Mission, One Nation

SO THE PUBLIC MAY KNOW

Cities in Peril!

The 120 existing Cities of the Philippines protest the conversion of 16 municipalities which did not meet the income requirement as mandated by the Local Government Code of 1991, as amended by R.A. 9009.

The law requires among others a Php 100 million locally generated income in order to be a city but the 13th Congress in 2007 enacted cityhood laws which exempted 16 cities from this requirement.

As a result, the increase in the 2008 Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) for the 120 existing cities is substantially reduced from 14.3% to only 4.7% or a loss of Php 4 billion. On the average, existing cities lost 33 million of their 2008 IRA.

This is illustrated in the list of most affected cities:

City	2007 IRA	2008 (before conversion of 16 municipalities	2008 (after conversion of 16 municipalities	Increase (before conversion of 16 municipalities	Increase (after conversion of 16 municipalities	Difference in Increase (before and after conversion)
Davao	1,792,378455	2,055,939,091	1,861,880,000	263,560,636	69,481,545	194,079,091
Puerto Princesa	971,504,500	1,117,640,725	973,209,121	146,136,225	1,704,621	144,431,604
Zamboanga	1,015,361,518	1,166,206,920	1,051,235,064	150,845,402	35,873,546	114,971,856
Santiago City	563,439,354	647,980,042	566,151,306	84,540,688	2,711,952	81,828,736
Iligan	573,204,736	658,404,516	589,572,762	85,199,780	16,368,026	68,831,754
Butuan	562,731,289	646,021,871	577,858,794	83,290,582	15,127,505	68,163,077
Calbayog	485,543,200	557,963,856	492,127,034	72,420,656	6,583,834	65,836,822

What are some dire consequences of this minimal increase in IRA?

* Delivery of basic services will be adversely affected
*Implementation of identified priority projects and programs may be delayed
*Possible layoff of casual employees of city governments
*Payment of loans for investments may be jeopardized

Moreover, the IRA per capita of cities has actually been going down. In 1996, IRA per capita of cities was 20% higher than the IRA per capita of provinces and municipalities (Php 981 compared to Php 815).

However by 2005, this situation was reversed. The IRA per capita of cities was 30% lower than that of the provinces and municipalities (Php 1,692 compared to Php 2,153). This is not surprising considering that cities account for 34% of the total population yet only share 23% of the IRA pie.

To make matters worse, House Bill 24 which converts all capital towns of province into cities and exempting them from income requirements of RA 9009 has also been passed at the Committee level in Congress. This would mean an additional 27 new cities.

More than the issue of the minimal increase in IRA, this is really an issue of delivery of basic services to the people. It is an issue of process and legality. It is an issue of Congress abiding with law that they themselves made.

We call for a Moratorium on creation of new cities until a more in-depth study is undertaken for a more rationale basis for cityhood. We call on our citizens to join the cities in this fight.

United as One Brotherhood of Leaders, the Cities under the League of Cities of the Philippines
stand strongly in protest for the protection of our Rights!

You don't have to be a champion to save at least 10% on fuel usage.

59% of participants achieved fuel efficiency with Shell's first-ever Fuel Economy Program.

Last June, Shell not only introduced its fuel economy formulas in gasoline and diesel to its local motorists, but it also shared results of a global fuel economy study conducted across 11 countries, the Philippines being a major player.

Findings of the study conducted last year reveal a gap in knowledge and action, with very few motorists being aware of the range of things they can do to help save fuel. The report suggests that motorists need to be convinced of the fact that improving fuel economy is simple and helps save money.

In the Philippines:

- Filipinos enjoy driving and are conscious of the freedom their car gives them.
- Fuel consumption is important for Filipinos with eight in ten drivers saying that they would consider mileage before purchasing a car. Six in ten check how much mileage they can get from their car.
- While driving, Filipinos are aware of their fuel consumption, especially when driving long journeys, in traffic jams and when carrying heavy loads.
- Lastly, regardless of whether they are currently doing anything, most drivers in the Philippines are easily persuaded to do more if they could get more information on how to be more fuel efficient (71% on average).

THE BASIS OF OUR REAL WORLD FLEET TEST

- Everyday driving day and night in real and normal work conditions
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- 30 days for performance accuracy and consistency
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Aligned with Shell's global vision to help the world's motorist save on fuel, Shell conducted a fuel economy study locally with three major fleet groups, involving more than 300 participants whose fuel consumption were closely monitored to prove that savings of 10 percent or more fuel are achievable using a combination of the right fuel and driving techniques.

PILIPINAS SHELL PROUDLY ANNOUNCES THE RESULTS OF ITS FIRST EVER FUEL ECONOMY PROGRAM

- 59% of participants achieved fuel economy benefits
- 48% of participants achieved a fuel economy benefit of 5% to 20%
- 11% achieved a 10% to 30% increase in fuel economy

Yes, the Filipino motorists can achieve greater fuel economy. The results of the study clearly showed that Shell's vision is achievable.

Here are real people who achieved real savings on their fuel usage.

Julius Coville (Sales Agent, Cebu) : Saved 14.3% on fuel consumption

"Oh ang nakita ng resulta ko – dun ang acceleration mas maliit? Dito ko nasi wall with improved acceleration and is more fuel efficient. He was also very thankful for the tips the service gave him. Even if the tips he picked up were basic, it was a reminder for things that we sometimes take for granted because of this, they were able to help the company save on fuel expenses.

Roy Montesore (Sales Agent, Cagayan de Oro) : Saved 10.6% on fuel consumption

"Ok naman, Nakaginit, magganda ang hatak ng makina!" (I was able to save. Engine had more power.) was what Mr. Montesore thought about switching to Shell Diesoline Ultra. Average savings was 200 to 250 pesos, depending on distance travelled. Overall, he found the services to be useful and informative. "Sabay-sabay na ginagawa (referring to trips). We will continue as per vehicle ng office".

Eustacio Ompoy (Sales, Cebu) : Saved 10.0% on fuel consumption

When asked about Shell Fuels, Mr. Ompoy said "performance of diesel – maganda naman. Okay ang performance kaya sa pagpapatakbo ni hatak ng makina". His performance is also based on the way the engine runs). The seminar was very helpful to Mr. Ompoy. He added that "It's very advantageous sa makatipid. Nakakatakbo ng malayo kaya. 2 km savings sa bawat refuel" (It is very advantageous in some. I was able to travel further. ... I have 2 km savings every time I refuel). From what he learned in the program, he is now making a conscious effort to apply these tips. He also wishes that Shell continues this program.

Wolfie Baloy (Sales Agent, Davao) : Saved 18.4% on fuel consumption

"Ever since I attended [one] ng [seminar] [the company] used a different fuel brand] then, after our seminar, we shifted to Shell. It was observed that there's an effect – for city driving, we average 8.9 km/liter from 7.8 km/liter, for shore driving/long distance, we average 11 km/liter from 10 km/liter". The seminar also brought up tips on how to save fuel, like excess baggage can greatly decrease fuel economy. According to Mr. Baloy, this is something positive for the company. He is open to more tips that Shell may give in the future.

Jesse Lorres (Regional Sales – Visayas) : Saved 10.6% on fuel consumption

Jesse has been using Shell for his car that he owned through a company car plan. The cost saving tips is what he noticed most and he hopes that Shell continues its work with the fleet company. According to him, "mas maliwanag ang resulatan kapag Shell ang gagamitin". If you go further when I use Shell, also adding in conclusion "personally, I am a die hard fan of Shell".

With Shell's over a century of experience developing fuels technology and serving customers, the company has a core role to play in meeting today's energy challenge - helping customers save on fuel and helping the world use its energy more sustainably. This program is only one element, but Shell is positive and hopeful that it will help show that there is plenty we can all do: improving fuel economy is simple and accessible to all.

SHELL FUEL TIPID TIPS

Fuel Matters
Fuel economy is maximized through a combination of good driving habits and using the right fuel. Shell fuel economy formula is designed to help reduce friction and improve cleanliness in the engine, thereby improving fuel efficiency.

Drive smoothly, drive safely
Aggressive driving can use as much as a third more fuel. Avoid accelerating or braking too hard and try to keep your steering as smooth as possible.

Avoid over revving
Change gears carefully. Never "redline" the rev counter because you unnecessarily waste fuel.

Keep your tires at the right pressure
A tire that is underinflated reduces fuel efficiency. An under- or over-inflated tire is also more susceptible to failing and blow out.

Avoid high speeds
The faster you go, the more wind resistance you'll encounter and the more fuel your vehicle will consume just to maintain speed.

Tune and service your engine regularly
A well-tuned engine can help improve fuel economy, so change your oil frequently and follow your car manufacturer's recommendation on servicing.

Remove the roof rack
Roof racks affect the aerodynamic efficiency of vehicles and create drag, reducing fuel economy.

Avoid carrying excess weight
Every extra pound affects fuel efficiency. Keep your trunk or back seat clear of unnecessary items that you use once in a while and just add weight to your vehicle (i.e. golf clubs).

Use airconditioning sparingly
Air conditioning puts added strain on the engine and uses fuel to operate.

Avoid excess idling
Idling burns fuel. Turn the engine off when you're waiting for more than two minutes.

Too many RP cities, mayors complain

ESTRADA with Villar: Not running but campaigning

Erap says he's not running

By Kristine L. Alave and Nestor P. Burgos Jr.

A PROPOSED BILL THAT WOULD grant automatic cityhood to provincial capitals has caused alarm among members of the League of Cities of the Philippines (LCP), who fear such a law would further reduce their limited Internal Revenue Allotments (IRA).

In a press conference yesterday, city mayors said they will fly their city flags at half-staff on Tuesday and require city hall workers to wear arm bands to decry cuts in their IRA share and register their objections to the bill filed by Zamboanga Sibugay Rep. Ann Hofer.

LCP President and Mandaluyong City Mayor Benjamin "Benhur" Abalos led a delegation of 90 city mayors to Malacañang on Tuesday to ask President Macapagal-Arroyo to declare a two-year moratorium on the creation of new cities in view of their already decreased share of internal revenue.

The creation of 16 new cities last year has more than cut into the sharing the revenue pie that went to the 1,512 cities, Abalos said.

The 120-member strong LCP told Ms Arroyo at a luncheon meeting that the decrease in their share of the IRA this year would greatly affect their capability to provide basic services for their constituents.

According to Abalos, the President promised them that she would certify as urgent a bill to impose a ban on new cities to arrest the increasing number of cities in view of their already decreased share of internal revenue.

But Hofer's House Bill 24 seeks to amend Republic Act 9009 or the Local Government Code by converting the capital towns of provinces into the income requirement of city-hood.

Under the Local Government Code, a town should have a locally generated income of at least P100 million annually before it could be classified as a city and a land area of at least 100 square kilometers or a population of 150,000.

Hofer argued that the income requirement "has unduly restricted the economic, political and socioeconomic development of the municipalities which are more or capital towns of provinces which have no cities."

But Abalos said creating cities that do no meet the income requirements of cityhood would further reduce the income of existing cities.

"We are having a serious problem that will affect the delivery of services and operations of cities dependent on the IRA," Abalos said in a telephone interview.

Budget Secretary Rolando Andaya's said in an earlier interview that existing cities will lose on average of P2 million from their IRA share for every new city that is added.

The conversion of 16 cities into towns would add to an average decrease of P32 million IRA share per city.

The LCP members were supposed to receive a total of P6 billion additional IRA this year but will be getting only P4.7 billion, because of the additional cities.

Metro Manila cities incurred an average reduction in supposed IRA of P30 million.

Abalos said that if House Bill 24 passed, 16 capital towns will be converted into cities and this would mean a further reduction of their IRA share by P16 million. With reports by Dhrexine Avendaño

Bishops in Palace: What's wrong with it?

By Michael Lim Ubac

A CLOSED-DOOR MEETING between Malacañang officials and Catholic bishops last Monday did not violate the constitutional doctrine of the separation of Church and State, said Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita.

Ermita said the bishops were acting as "shepherds of the flock," finding ways to alleviate the plight of the poor in their dioceses.

He said the Church supports a quiet dialogue with the Palace, but declined to name those who attended the meeting.

The meeting was part of a regular dialogue that the Palace has been holding with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines for the past two years, said Secretary Cerge Remonde, chief of the Presidential Management Staff.

It had its "political significance," but was it part of efforts to consolidate support for President Macapagal-Arroyo amid new plots to destabilize the government, he said.

"It is the duty of government to meet through dialogues with all sectors of society and be briefed with their concerns on the way government is being run," Remonde said.

"There are sensitive manifestations on how responsive the government is to legitimate concerns of responsible sectors," he said.

The bishops had requested no media coverage, Remonde said.

About 20 bishops led by Tagaytay-area Archbishop Orlando Quevedo, Lipa Archbishop Ramon Arguelles and Cubao Bishop Antonio Tobias attended the meeting, he said.

Cabinet members who were present included, besides Remonde, Cabinet Secretary Raul de Salonda and secretaries Lito Atienza (environment), Ismael Khan (justice), Gilbert Teodoro (defense), Francisco Duque (health) and Arthur Yap (agriculture), and Commission on Elections Chairman Benjamin Abalos Sr.

Also present were Presidential Anti-Graft Commissioner Dennis Arroyo and Presidential Adviser on Peace Process Jesus Dureza.

"We were able to brief bishops about their concerns on poverty, existing anti-corruption issues," Remonde said.

Deputy Presidential Spokesperson Lorelei Fajardo said the bishops took the opportunity to express various concerns "close to the hearts of their parishioners."

Their primary concern was what programs were being undertaken to mitigate poverty, he said.

"The bishops expressed their gratitude for the briefing and informed their desire for a continuing series of dialogues, to better chair the issues after they expressed concern over the information coming only from the media and the opposition," said Fajardo.

In turn, the bishops asked that the government speed up the completion of infrastructure projects like farm-to-market roads, dams and other projects designed to benefit the poor.

Some of the issues raised by the bishops included the demolition of squatter dwellers in Metro Manila, the environmental impact of increasing mining activities in the country and the failure to implement agrarian reform in certain areas.

Ermita said the bishops asked that the Palace look into the "ill effects" of the operation of mining companies, particularly on indigenous peoples.

The bishops refuted the contents of letters ever laid disputes that remain pending at the Department of Agrarian Reform.

The prelates also deplored the demolition of squatter shanties by the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority.

The bishops said they were willing to sit down with the MMDA on the possibility of coming up with housing projects for the poor, including those living on the esplanade's bridges, Ermita said.

Air travel to RP still safe, envoy tells Americans

By Cynthia D. Balana

PHILIPPINE AMBASSADOR TO the United States Willy Gaa yesterday assured Americans and visitor operators that air travel to the Philippines has remained safe despite the downgrade of the country's air safety rating by the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

In a statement posted on the embassy's website, Gaa said that all necessary precautions were being undertaken by the government's transportation and aviation officials to maintain the safety travel records of Philippine air carriers.

"I would like to assure the traveling public that air travel to the Philippines remains safe and secure," Gaa said.

Gaa said that Philippine Airlines, the country's flag carrier, would continue to service its existing US routes—Los Angeles, San Francisco, Las Vegas via Vancouver, Honolulu and Guam.

He said the FAA ruling "does not entail additional restrictions on civil safety and maintenance record of an airline operating to and from the Philippines."

On Jan. 4, the US downgraded the Philippines from Category 1 to Category 2. It joined 207 other countries listed by the FAA that failed to provide safety oversight of their air carrier operations in accordance with the minimum safety oversight standards established by the ICAO.

Other countries with a Category 2 ranking include Bangladesh, Belize, Bulgaria, Cote D' Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), Gambia, Ghana, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Indonesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Serbia and Montenegro (formerly Yugoslavia), Swaziland, Ukraine, Uruguay and Zimbabwe.

Gaa said that under Category 2, Philippine airport facilities would be operating at normal conditions or "heightened FAA surveillance."

Accordingly, the International Aviation Safety Assessment (IASA) program of the FAA, which assigns these two-category ratings, "focuses on a country's ability and willingness to adhere to safety oversight standards and recommended practices for aircraft operations and maintenance established by the United Nations's technical agency for aviation, the International Civil Aviation Organization."

A Category 1 rating means that a country adheres to ICAO standards while Category 2 means failure to adhere.

Gaa said the Air Transportation Office has assured the public that it was taking all necessary corrective measures to return the Philippines to Category 1 status.

"Towards this end, President Macapagal-Arroyo has ordered the infusion of P50 million for the upgrade of the Philippines' ATO," the ambassador said.

DAA.

Corrections

IN TEE JAN. 17 ISSUE, an article on Page A4—"It'll be to prison for 'Binay's killers'"—mentioned that Sen. Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III is the eldest child of martyred Sen. Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr. The eldest child of the late senator is Maria Elena "Ballsy" Cruz.

* * *

IN THE JAN. 20 ISSUE, a front-page story—"Sto. Niño fest causes image's journey from Mexico to Manila"—misspelled the name of a congregation that organizes an annual exhibit of Sto. Niño images. The congregation's name is Congregacion del Santissimo—not Santisimo—Nombre de Niño Jesus.

* * *

IN THE JAN. 21 ISSUE, a commentary on Page A15 of the Opinion section—"Images of life in the New York subway"—misspelled the name of a music conservatory in New York City. The name of the conservatory is Juilliard—not Julliard—School.

* * *

IN THE JAN. 23 ISSUE, a front-page story—"Farmers met by jobless wearing caps"—misspelled the first name of the chief of the National Capital Region Police Office. The head of the NCRPO is Director Geary—not Gerry—Barias.

* * *

Readers may send their requests for corrections of factual errors in writing to the Ask Desk, Philippine Daily Inquirer, PSE Building, Ortigas Ave. Extension corner Meralco Ave., Barangay Ugong, Pasig City; fax 897-0170; e-mail address: <askdesk@inquirer.com.ph>.

Complaints about lack of fairness or objectivity may be sent to Letitia Stuart-Tuason, reader's advocate, e-mail address: <readersadvocate@inquirer.com.ph> or fax this: 897-4740-94, Attn: Reader's Advocate. For phone number is 897-8000 Local 342.

Healing priest draws throng near Malacañang

SOME 5,000 PEOPLE CAME TO get a glimpse of and be blessed by Fr. Fernando Suarez during a visit by the renowned healing priest to the St. Jude of Thaddeus Archdiocesan Shrine Parish in the Malacañang complex yesterday.

Suarez's gift of healing, which comes through the power of God, has attracted a huge number of devotees and followers all over the world. He usually prays with those seeking to be healed and extends God's healing hand by touching them.

According to the Presidential Security Group, people started gathering outside the church as early as 11 p.m. on Tuesday night for the healing Mass that did not start until 9 a.m. yesterday.

Following the two-and-a-half-hour Mass, Suarez climbed in the church stage to bless the crowd with holy water. Church workers and the priest's assistants would be seen replenishing several small bottles marked with the image of St. Jude from a five-gal lon-size container.

A sea of hands raised pictures of loved ones, handkerchiefs, rosaries, even a baseball cap or frames sprinkled holy water from above.

He took a short break to rest and eat a banana before resuming the healing sessions. Even then, a few individuals, with sick relatives in tow, approached him and begged him to bless their loved ones.

Constancio Bulang, who requested by utterly Mass at the church each Thursday, brought his 19-year-old grandson Derrick Dwight Bulang, who suffers from Autism Spectrum Disorder which has left him partially blind. The family has spent at least P700, 000 for his operations and medication.

Jun Aldaba

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MENDIOLA RALLY

CHR prober probed for gun-toting

By Jocelyn R. Uy

THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS yesterday said it would investigate one of its field investigators who was arrested by the police for bringing a gun to a protest rally commemorating the 21st anniversary of the "Mendiola Massacre."

Commissioner Wilfredo Sorano said CHR investigator Policronio Nalang Jr. will be asked to explain why he had a gun with him contrary to his mission order and to the basic rules of the commission.

He said the commission was "a little bit embarrassed" by the incident.

Nalang was one of the investigators fielded by the CHR the other day to observe the rally staged by militant farmers on Don Chino Roces Bridge (formerly Mendiola Bridge. Thirteen farmers died on that bridge in 1987 during a violent dispersal of a rally demanding agrarian reform.

Sorano explained that the commission had deployed two teams—in Mendiola and in Monjeta—to make sure "that the rights of the rallying farmers will be protected."

He said Nalang, who was assigned to Monjeta, has yet to explain why he was in Mendiola instead.

"He has a lot of explaining to do," Sorano told the Inquirer in a phone interview.

"We have been emphatic in reminding the police not to carry firearms during protest actions. Now, one of us has violated just that," Sorano said.

Nalang was brought to the Manila prosecutor's office for inquest yesterday for possible violation of the provisions of the Human Rights Victims Act of 1995.

"We commend the Manila police for properly handling Nalang and (for) just (how) to show that his actions will not be tolerated by the commission," he added.

OFWs barred from Jordan due to abuses

DUE TO COMPLAINTS FROM MORE than a hundred abused Filipino domestic helpers, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) has decided to ban the deployment of new hires to Jordan.

Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) chief Rosalinda Dimapilis-Baldoz said the deployment ban would take effect immediately.

"We received the order from DOLE Secretary Arturo Brion last Monday," Baldoz said in a press conference yesterday. She said the increasing number of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in distress in Jordan prompted the labor chief to issue the order.

"We have been instructed to stop the processing of workers, mainly household helpers, to Jordan," Baldoz added.

The POEA chief said around 150 female OFWs, who were subjected to abuse and maltreatment by their employers, have sought shelter at the Filipino Workers' Resource Center in Jordan. Margaux C. Avila

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RPN NEWS makes available to the media a series of video frames showing Daza Bumag and Marine Capt. Alexson Fuentes engaged in what appears to be a deep conversation. AFP PHOTO

PNP hit for witch-hunt; video doesn't show much

To page A-2

Because yesterday showed a scenario could be for flashing an unedited interviewing Fuentes in the hotel and not handing him a press card. He appears to be holding a tape recorder instead. Also, her hair was not curly.

Manipol Shiites Bureau, RPN 9 News and Cabinet affairs chairman, said in a statement the footage showed "fraudulent, in one corner of the Peninsula lobby, speaking with one lady reporter."

This was apparently before police caring an unnamed prosecutor carried out test gas called the seven-hour takeover of the Peninsula by rebel soldiers.

Danza said the footage was taken accidentally. She said the network was not taking sides and was making the TV clip available to anyone in the interest of transparency.

'My conscience is clear'

She said the network refused to turn footage of the Peninsula siege to the PNP in compliance with a subpoena.

"I am frustrated to be one of the victims in the government's witch-hunt against the media. But my conscience is clear for I have done nothing wrong," Bumag said in a text message to the Inquirer yesterday.

She said she had not been harassed by the police that she was a suspect in Fuentes's escape.

"I agreed to the authorities to file the proper charges before the courts to prove that this is a government of laws," she said.

Scapegoat

Fuentes' lawyer, Dido Cruz-Angeles, said the PNP was using a woman as a "scapegoat."

"They are putting the blame on someone else to conceal their failure. We will, 1,500 trained and 500 cops at Manila Bay, not even succeed in helping Fuentes escape, as they claimed ... They are trying to smear themselves from the culpability," Angeles told the Inquirer in a phone interview.

She recalled that police arrested some 40 members of the core of the mutiny against former Navy lt. Antonio Trillanes IV now a senator, allegedly because one of them had helped Fuentes escape. But she said at that time no one else did not know that Fuentes was in disguise in the hotel.

"The insinuation is the media are in cahoots with," Angeles said. "It is demeaning as from the media point, whatever pains from me."

Intimidation campaign

The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, in a statement signed by its chair, Jim Torres Jr., accused the PNP of engaging in an "insidious intelligence" to "intimidate media and control the flow of information."

"We challenge the police to prove the RPN footage that a claims distort Bumag helping Fuentes. We, NUJP, though them to file the case if they have a case to file. Otherwise, they should stop the witch-hunting and stop scapegoating done behind the skirt of uncommon and unofficial sources," Torres said.

Earlier, veteran journalists Ellen Tordesillas of Malaya and Ces Drilon of ABS-CBN slammed the PNP for insinuating that they were involved in Fuentes's escape.

Fuentes, 42, was among those arrested and charged with rebellion in connection with the 2003 Oakwood mutiny. He escaped in December 2005 and was recaptured a month later following the Peninsula incident, a P1-million reward was put up for his capture.

Revelations about the alleged involvement of media in Fuentes's escape came amid claims by Malacañang and police officials of a new threat to oust President Macapagal-Arroyo and warnings journalists covering emergencies have arrest.

ABS-CBN news people have gone to the Supreme Court to void the arrest of future arrests.

'It's about time'

Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez said yesterday if the PNP had evidence against journalists involved in the Peninsula incident it should furnish evidence so that his department could prosecute them.

"It's about time," Gonzalez said. "There were not too many females there, so if we are the process of elimination, it will not be difficult to narrow down the list."

Senior Supt. Nestor Barbosa, PNP spokesperson, yesterday declined to comment on the matter. "Let's let the operations and investigation are complete, we cannot disclose the name of the suspect," he said. With reports from Leila B. Salaverria and Marlon Ramos

Daughter seeks amparo for jailed mom, missing dad

From page A-1

DESPERATE SEARCHERS Lorena Santos, a daughter desperately seeking her parents, enters Edna Burgos who is looking for her son Jonas when she files a petition for the writs of amparo and habeas corpus at the Court of Appeals. ARMANDO

Santos asked the court to issue, while her petition was being heard, a temporary protection order for her mother to prevent her and her parents under the custody of a private institution that would ensure their safety.

She also asked to be allowed to inspect police and military detachments, and to gain access to documents pertaining to her parents.

Hearings on Santos' writs of petition were Presidential Management Assistant Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita, Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro, Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno, National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales, Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Hermogenes Esperon Jr., Philippine National Police Director-General Avelino Razon Jr., Lt. Gen. Alexander Yano, PNP Director Rigoberto Bonoan, Chief Supt. Raul Bacalzo, Chief Supt. Teodoro Dagupan Jr., Supt. Adrel Bolbas, Senior Supt. Jose Dacanay, Chief Insp. Ariel Arnaiz and Col. Edgardo Aglo.

Proud graduate

Santos said her mother was a graduate of a paramedical course and was working part-time for the communities in Cagayan Valley health practices, including the prevention of the spread of measles.

This was Jonito' account, in court in her petition.

On Nov. 26, 2007, Princess was leaving a Quezon City clinic where she had undergone a chest X-ray when men in black uniforms with police markings accosted her and shoved her into a waiting van.

The men's appearance subdued her in psychological torture. In '72 hours. She was kept stifled and blindfolded, and threatened with harm to get her to confess her alleged subversive activities.

She was also "forced to listen to extremely high volumes of television submission of top music, heavy metal and rock and roll."

Principe was subsequently presented to the media by the military which said she had the outstanding warrants of arrest for rebellion, kidnapping, murder, robbery and arson.

2 warrants

But Santos said she had checked the warrants and learned that only two warrants—which she described as "dubious and highly irregular"—had been issued by the courts in Cagayan Valley.

She said the first warrant for robbery with assault—issued on Nov. 21, 2008, by Judge Eden Hicon—had no caption and had blocked excuses on the spaces for the names of the accused and the checking of cases.

She added that she, along with members of Karapatan, later learned that the case was archived and dismissed on July 23, 1992, whereas Bunao issuing a new warrant.

The second warrant was issued by Judge Angelo Pino on Feb. 27, 1995, in connection with a rebellion case, Santos said.

But she said the records of the case could not be found.

She said her mother had also asked the police for copies of the documents to justify her arrest but that the latter had not responded to the.

All of these circumstances to the obvious fact that Elizabeth Principe was abducted without the benefit of a valid subsisting warrant, and neither were her rights in a manner supported when their custody from her took her into custody," the daughter said.

CIDG

As for Jun Delfin, Velasco was abducted in Cuyapo in Nueva Ecija on July 10, 2007, Santos said.

For her account, men in plainclothes, along with a man in a black shirt with the letters "CIDG" on the back, forced Velasco into a van.

After the two vehicles involved in the abduction left, a cop passed car came and a police officer arrived the phrase, Jonito says (That was once), referring to the operation and indicating that the police knew of it.

Jonito said that although the abduction was reported to the police, the latter did not conduct a genuine investigation and no arrests were given to date.

She said she checked with the Land Transportation Office the plate number of the van involved in the abduction, and found out that it did not match the vehicle on which it was last seen.

According to Santos, she wrote to the Intelligence Service of the AFP and was informed by Lt. Col. Ariel Bautista that Lee Velasco was on the target list of military intelligence.

She quoted Bautista as further saying that he was not involved in her father's abduction, and that if his father had been arrested, the military would have announced it.

Said Santos: "The petitioner strongly suspects that the combined military and police elements who have had their eyes on Lee Velasco are the ones responsible for the abducting him. Lt. Col. Ariel Bautista admitted to the petitioner that the military had long wanted to get Lee Velasco for his alleged underground activities, though he bluntly denied that he was involved [secretly]."

Plans of transfer

Santos also said that the police had announced plans to transfer Principe to the courts where the had pending cases.

But since the warrants are questionable, the plan could just be a "mere pretense to defer, or [Principe] to the detriment of the officers and men of the 7th Infantry Division," she said.

She feared that this could endanger her mother's life, and cited the statement of United Nations special rapporteur Philip Alston that the Philippine military doth severely with perceived rebels.

Laguna farmers to do a Sumilao: Marching on foot to Manila

From page A-1

members of Catholic parishes who attended a Bishops-legislators' forum on agrarian reform yesterday in Manila.

"The march is the only way we can get the government [to pay] attention to our plight," said with the church's help, we can get our land back," Evangelista Members of the Bicol's are, some said the heavens shortly before she addressed the forum.

Church officials are also backing the Sumilao farmers' claim to the land now owned by San Miguel Foods Inc. (SMFI).

Last December, after meeting with the Sumilao farmers, President Macapagal-Arroyo ordered the land awarded back to agricultural use. But the resolution of the case does not appear imminent.

Food and beverage giant San Miguel Corp., parent company of SMFI, has formally sought a reconsideration of Ms Arroyo's order, according to Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita.

'Nowhere else to go'

"All I know is the SMFI has already submitted a motion for reconsideration to the Office of the President. So we have to await the next action by the Office of the President," Ermita said in a press conference yesterday in Malacañang.

Bernie Gonzalez, chairperson of SMFI, said recently turned in Cagayan, Columbia, not claiming 5,811 hectares of the 8,000 hectares that comprised the old sugar farms owned by Jose Yulo Sr., who once variously served as Speaker of the House and Chief Justice.

After the old man's death, the estate was partitioned by the Yulo companies, Mendiola said.

"We have nowhere else to go. We have no other means of livelihood except the land we have tilled since the time of the Americans," she said.

According to Mendiola, the Bicolanos will converge in Laguna's capital town, Sta. Cruz, before heading to Manila on Feb. 1.

It will picket the Supreme Court, Department of Justice, Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board and the Yulo corporate offices in Makati City before setting up camp at the Department of Agrarian Reform in Quezon City.

Mendiola said around 200 farmer-families who had yet to organize themselves were currently evicted from where they were living in Casalubong.

She said the farmers were constantly rake way for an upscale subdivision being developed by an investor, and that the entered families were now in a "limbo [it]" area place of land designated by the Yulos as the farmers' resettlement site.

Exemption order

Per Mendiola's account, the Yulos obtained an order from the DAR in 1992-93 to exempt the land from coverage by the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program.

The Yulos said they would convert the land into an agro-industrial area. But when no development took place within the next 15 years, the farmers petitioned the local government to revert the land back to agricultural use and submit it to CARP coverage.

Four of the cases filed by the farmers pending by the revocation of the exemption order were dismissed by the DAR central office on technical grounds in November and December last year.

The Sumilao property in Bukidnon, which was formerly owned by the Quisumbing family, was also exempted from CARP coverage when it was reclassified as agro-industrial land during the Estrada administration.

It was subsequently sold to SMFI, which is leasing to the former cheesecake tobacco cultivators of land ownership were cancelled by virtue of the DAR exemption, failed to develop it within the prescribed period.

SMFI is building a hog farm on the contested property, but the farmers' contention is that a more-and-desire order should be issued.

Waiting game

Ermita said the parties concerned in the Sumilao case should listen to reasons, memorandum from the Office of the Deputy Executive Secretary for Legal Affairs.

He said there was a "Win Choice" that Ms Arroyo would reserve her order favoring the claimed farmers.

"I'm pretty sure done giving the land back to the farmers was the President's intention when she ordered the reversion of the land to agricultural use.

Ermita said Ms Arroyo's address was "a very good first step" toward addressing the farmers' concerns.

But he said the time was not ripe for the issuance of the reconsidered order that the farmers were seeking.

"There is a need to give the bidder—it's that case, the SMFI—a chance to air its views," he said. "We will review the points raised by SMFI in its motion for reconsideration." With a report from Michael Lim Ubay

BISHOPS LEAN TOWARDS CALOOCAN Speaker Jose de Venecia and CBCP president Archbishop Angel Lagdameo are in solidarity on agrarian reform at the Pope Pius XII Catholic Center in Manila. ARMANDO

Truce before peace talks, gov't tells Reds

By Christine O. Avendaño

THE GOVERNMENT WILL RETURN TO the negotiating table with communist insurgents only if the rebels agree to a cessation of hostilities, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said yesterday.

This is not an ultimatum but "it's a condition that we are asking them to agree to," he said.

"Because what is the endgame for negotiations? Let us silence the guns," Ermita said, adding that the national security cluster group of the Cabinet framed up this position before Christmas.

Ermita said the Cabinet's unilateral move to declare holidays for a cessation of hostilities would "help hasten the negotiations."

Norberto Gonzales, the national security adviser, said the government wanted a concession of hostilities "so that while we're talking, there would be peace."

He said this was the tack taken with the Moro National Liberation Front, which signed a peace pact in 1996, and again with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front with which the government is conducting peace talks.

The Norwegian ambassador has been advised that the government was sticking with its position that it will only resume negotiations with the Communist Party of the Philippines and its allied organizations, the National Democratic Front and New People's Army, if they agree to a cessation of hostilities, Ermita said.

Norway is brokering the peace talks with the communist rebels.

Stop hostilities

Gonzales said he called up the Norwegian ambassador after learning that Luis Jalandoni, the chair of the NDF peace council, had said that Norway was willing to host exploratory talks for the two sides in Oslo next month.

He said he told the Norwegian envoy that the "atmosphere" for the peace talks would be good if the government and the NPA would stop hostilities.

He said that Norway has been waiting for word from the government on how to proceed with the talks that have been stalled for the past three years.

Gonzales said he did not know if the NDF's recent interest in resuming the talks had any bearing on the case that Jose Maria Sison, the CPP's founder, is facing in the Netherlands.

Sison is under investigation by Dutch prosecutors in connection with the murder complaint filed against him by the widows of communist leaders Antonio Tiamzon and Benjamin Ka mas.

"We will just wait what will be the response of the Norwegian government which will relay this to the NDF," Gonzales said.

By agreeing to a ceasefire, the communist rebels would show "how serious are they in working at a peaceful settlement and ending the fighting in the field," Ermita said.

"If they are serious about ending the conflict, they should agree," he said.

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THE DAILY GOSPEL

Thursday, January 24, 2008
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Feria or Sabbath

1st Reading: 1 S 15:3-5, 7-11
Gospel: Mk 3:7-12

Jesus and his disciples withdrew to the lakeside and a large crowd from Galilee followed him. A great number of people also came from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, Transjordan and from the region of Tyre and Sidon, for they had heard of all that he was doing.

Because of the crowd, Jesus told his disciples to have a boat ready for him, in case the people from crushing him. He healed so many that all who had diseases kept pressing forward to him to touch him. Even the people who had evil spirits, whenever they saw him, would fall down before him and cry out, "You are the Son of God." But he warned them severely not to tell anyone who he was.

Today's Thought

Jesus' popularity spells out the fact something of great importance to offer the people of Israel. He wants give comfort to the crushed and the souls healed the body.

A true disciple not only going out to the earthly ministry of Jesus. He was leading all things to us to be saved from sickness to sickness.

We participate in the love of Jesus when we draw near to Jesus and allow Him into our lives. He wants give meaning, purpose and direction to our lives. He wants through his sacraments to bring about healing and rejuvenation in the soul. Draw near to Him every day that you might have life, and have it to the full.

Worried GMA calls Palace to ask how RP stocks faring

By Michael Lim Ubac

WITH GLOBAL FINANCIAL markets roiled by fears of the US economy slipping into a recession, President Teodoro Mangagdal-Arroyo yesterday phoned Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita from Switzerland to ask about how the local bourse was faring.

The President, who is attending the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in the Swiss resort of Davos, which started recording made the call even after Malacañang said the country "will weather any storm," he said.

Ms Arroyo called up Ermita in the middle of his press conference in Malacañang, which was release live by government TV and radio stations, to ask about the stock market and other economic indicators.

GMA focused

The executive secretary then excused himself, disappeared briefly then went back to the Palace media briefing room and resumed his weekly press conference.

"You can see how focused the President is. She is (in a far away land), yet she called up to ask about us," Ermita said.

"How are you? It's cold here. What is the effect of the announcement in media about the American drop in the stock market?" Ms Arroyo was quoted by Ermita as saying.

He said he told Ms Arroyo that it was the burning issue of the day.

Specific figures

Ms Arroyo then asked Ermita to get "specific figures from" the Department of Finance and Bangko Sentral Economic and Development Authority.

Ermita said Ms Arroyo's confidence for Cabinet officials "to focus our attention" on all the problems in the province.

"If other countries such as the European Union could very well be affected by this economic slowdown, you see how it is for a developing country such as the Philippines," he said.

Ermita said the government would focus its attention on implementing infrastructure projects and hastening their completion so people could benefit from them.

"That will help cushion the impact of this slowdown of the economy of the United States," he said.

When Ms Arroyo arrived her party left Tuesday for a seven-day trip to Switzerland and the Middle East, she ordered the Cabinet to speed up the implementation of all projects in the pipeline to mitigate the adverse impact of a weakening US economy on the Philippines.

2 external threats

At the Cabinet meeting she attended before leaving for Davos, Ms Arroyo acknowledged that rising oil prices and the weakening US economy were two external threats to the country's economy.

Ermita said the Arroyo administration was working to improve relations with other countries "so the Philippines does not become too dependent on one country."

As Ms Arroyo is away, Ermita is tasked with presiding over an emergency meeting of the administration's economic managers to discuss whether to adjust growth targets and the goal to achieve a balanced budget this year.

Ermita said Malacañang was in the process of ascertaining the ill effects of the US economic slowdown.

GMA: Our economy is booming; RP will weather world crunch

From page A1

told leaders of the IMCC at the Savoy Hotel. "But like so many places in rich and poor nations alike, we must fight to close the gap in income inequality."

IMCC is a nonprofit organization established to promote economic and business relations between Switzerland, Southeast Asia and Korea based on the principle of reciprocal benefit.

Ms Arroyo made the speech on the same day that the World Economic Forum in the Swiss ski resort of Davos opened.

At the 1988 World Economic Forum opened, the global economy was beset with huge slides in stock markets, slowing growth, the subprime crisis and increasing oil, food and other commodity prices.

"I don't know whether there will be a recession in the United States, but I do know that one year ago, at this time, things were very rosy," Rafael Buhay Hilado told the Philippine industrial group Bajaj during a visit against Prince Peter in Davos.

APPLAUSE! Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo and officers of the Swiss-Asian Chamber of Commerce applaud President Arroyo after her speech at the Savoy Hotel.

Credits: BSP

Ms Arroyo, who led an 85-member delegation and who is not expected to return to Manila today, credited the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas for marking the economy "more resilient to external volatility."

"In the midst of world uncertainties, it helps that we have one of the best and most sensitive central banks in the world, which has helped the Philippines achieve a stable macroeconomic environment that is making us much more resilient to external volatility," she said.

Not dependent on US market

She added: "We are vigilant that our efforts should not be derailed by the subprime crisis and the enthusiasm needs remain."

Ms Arroyo said the government was focusing on Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Governor Amando Tetangco Jr and his team to continue to "ensure macroeconomic fundamentals" to support the country's robust economic growth as it is free of global economic volatility.

She later said in a forum that the Philippines was a "free enterprise economy" and that government would not meddle with the current bank in determining the foreign exchange rate.

Finance Secretary Margarito Teves earlier said that the Philippines could withstand the adverse effects of a US recession, slowdown or recession because of its "improving economic fundamentals."

In an interview with reporters, Teodoro Secretary Boni Favila said the country should not worry about the slowdown of the US economy.

"From in the data Favila re-

gion, many of the economies are not necessarily dependent on the US market. Our export market to the US has gone down, but our economy is growing. So by and large, it's a globalized economy," Favila told reporters.

"And we no longer listened to just one market economy," he said.

Investment haven

In her speech, Ms Arroyo said the Philippines was "on the path to permanent economic growth and stability" and hence, remains a favorable investment haven.

"We have created seven million jobs in seven years. We have achieved 28 consecutive quarters of economic growth even when many of our neighbors experienced negative growth or even recession at some time or another of the last seven years," Ms Arroyo said.

"In fact our economy, which rose 7.1 percent in the first three quarters of 2007, is experiencing its fastest growth in more than one decade," she said.

Faster growth

Ms Arroyo noted that the Philippines grew "faster" than the rest of Southeast Asia, despite oil price volatility and a global economic slowdown.

"Our international reserves are also at record levels. We have a balance of payments surplus, a low inflation rate and low interest rates," she said.

"Business and investor confidence is on the rise. The peso is one of the world's best performing currencies, and our stock market has reached historic heights. Our budget is under control, and we are raising unprecedented amounts of revenue," she said.

Ms Arroyo said that the strong peso has helped mitigate the impact of the escalating prices of crude oil, resulting an increase in public transportation fare.

"We've not had an increase in public transportation fare. That would have started a spiral of inflation. But prices, per makers up for the high price of oil in the world market," she said.

Hedge facilities for OFWs

Ms Arroyo announced that she was setting up "hedge facilities" for overseas Filipino workers in Dubai to keep them insulated from an unstable peso-dollar exchange rate.

"I've instructed the Department of Labor and Employment to combine the cost in the foreign exchange rate and the salaries of workers so that contracts will now stipulate that they will be paid in pesos or dollars, whichever is stronger," she said.

Ms Arroyo said that in the face of the volatility in world markets, the Philippines, thanks to its sound economic fundamentals, was offering itself as a "strategic location" for business opportunities.

"We have met the challenge of economic and fiscal reform," she said.

Highly trained manpower

She said that investment in the Philippines had grossed more than five-fold from 2003 to 2007, thanks to the billion-dollar investments by major international companies, including Texas Instruments.

Ms Arroyo added that the country ranked among the most attractive call-shoring destinations in the world because of "our competitiveness" and highly trained, English-speaking IT-adept manpower.

"Our outsourcing sector has the potential to grow 40 percent per year from 2007 until 2013," she said. With a report from AFP

Traders told to tap OFW experts, not foreign consultants

From page A1

A newly formed group calling itself the Global Filipino Nation (GFN) is seeking to address this problem.

Instead of spending for foreign consultants, the business sector can tap those OFWs, said GFN spokesperson Jun Aguilar. He said the government should begin gathering data on situating OFWs to business their potential in operations and exports.

Dairy dissatisfaction

Aguilar noted that the world's biggest dissatisfaction plant in the industrial city of Jubail in Saudi Arabia and the biggest commercial dairy farm in Riyadh, also in Saudi Arabia, were manned by Filipino engineers and technicians.

"Imagine how productive it would be if we could bring these Filipinos home to replicate the technology in the country," he said.

Given the right opportunities, the returning workers could contribute their experience to help the country, he said.

Aguilar gave as an example engineers in their 50s and 60s who have decided to come home from the Middle East up on their retirement.

"These engineers are often treated like they have nothing useful to contribute anymore," said Aguilar, himself an engineer who worked in Saudi Arabia.

"Instead of paying thousands of dollars to hire foreign consultants, companies should seriously consider maximizing the use of these returning OFWs," he said.

Database

Aguilar said he knew of one civil engineer in his 50s who used to work as a structural engineer/architect in Saudi Arabia.

"When the engineer came back to the Philippines, he was employed as a consultant," he said. However, the instability of the job forced the engineer to reapply for work abroad.

"He was an expert in his field for many decades. And yet he could not be employed by companies who only need his skills because of the lack of data on returning migrant workers," Aguilar said.

The GFN moreover also said that the government should begin tracking down world-class Filipinos who want to help the economy and include them in the database.

"There are a lot of these people. We just have no idea where they are," Aguilar said.

He said the government should thoroughly discuss and study its reintegration programs for OFWs.

Reintegration program

"The Department of Labor and Employment has announced that more than 75 percent of businesses initiated by OFWs have been unsuccessful," Aguilar said.

This has prompted the creation of the Center for OFW Reintegration program, he said.

However, the government's reintegration program remains unsustainable, with OFWs engaging in businesses that they do not have the heart to invest in, he said.

Aguilar said that aside from the social and welfare frameworks, GFN would push for the technical empowerment of OFWs.

National party for OFWs

"One of the things we discussed during our preplanning conference last July was pushing up a national party for overseas Filipinos, which would be at par with the major political parties in the country," Aguilar said.

He said the GFN would not be a party-list group.

Aguilar said his group would work to increase awareness among global Filipinos of the importance of absentee voting and lobby the government to set up the constitutional apparatus of the post against the dilatar and the high cost of sending their earnings.

Another concern, Victor Barrios, said the GFN would hold a Global Filipino Week 9 to 11 to flesh out its programs of action.

"We believe that effective governance should be anchored on the political, economic and social empowerment of the global Filipino," Barrios said.

The GFN includes the Global Filipino Coalition, National Federation of Filipino and American Associations, Filipino Migrant Workers Group, Economic Resource Center for Overseas Filipinos, Ugat Foundation, Center for Strategic Studies, OFW Congress, Overseas Filipino Caucus for Development and Miriam College's Institute of Migration Studies.

Year of Rat lucky for GMA, says feng shui master

From page A1

promotion of the "slickest and back-stabbing star" in the entertainment.

Because Malacañang has good feng shui this year, Chan does not foresee "any big problems" for Ms Arroyo.

On the economic front, he said that despite turmoil in the financial sector, it would be a "lucky" year for businesses, especially the sectors associated with the earth sign, such as tourism, construction, real estate, transportation, mining and logistics.

Even the stock market will be good, especially for stocks of companies in "lucky" metals-related industries.

"If a person is not too greedy, he will win in the market," Chan said.

Romance star

The Year of the Rat is also expected to bring fortune to those in the entertainment business—movies, television, even publishing, because the "romance star" is present.

On the other hand, he sees a challenging year ahead for those in the garments, boutique and bookstore businesses.

"It is not that they will not make money. They will, but they will face more competition this year," Chan said.

"People in these kinds of business will have to be more creative in looking at market trends. They must know how to respond to challenges."

The Hong Kong-based geomancer also characterized the Year of the Rat as fortuitous for people between 24 and 36 years old, and even more so for young men.

Period of change

Chan described the Year of the Earth Rat as a "period of change" because it marks the start of another 12-year cycle, which starts with the rat and ends with the pig.

As such, Chan said it was a good time for persons to head over the international business to the next generation or to start new ventures. The "wealth star," after all, is in the east.

He added that the earth settings more luck than the fire rat, which began the renaissance five period from 1996-2007.

Chan said this was why the previous 12 years was marked with calamity events such as the 1997 Asian currency crisis, the 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States and the 2003 SARS epidemic.

Bittersweet

"The coming 12 years should bring more luck than the past 12 years," he said.

For individuals, Chan said it would be a good year for those born in the year of the ox, tiger, dragon, monkey and dog.

On the other hand, the ox, horse, rabbit, rooster and goat are in conflict with the Tai Sui (Grand Duke) of the year, which means that their luck will be better but their career later.

"Although they will face many obstacles and problems, in the end they will be able to settle yesterday," Chan said.

Tiny Swiss ski resort plays host to world's powerful, rich and famous

DAVOS, SWITZERLAND—OVER THE next few days, this tiny Swiss ski resort will host its annual reunion of the powerful, rich and famous, filling the rarefied atmosphere with opinion, polish and not a little of their own hot air.

This year, more than 2,500 political and business leaders from around the world, in the snow-bound, high-security resort of the World Economic Forum, which hosts some of the planet's top movers and shakers, often accused of championing an exclusively capitalist and free-market world view.

Membership fee: $38,700

The intent of their economic chat be-

From page A1

comes apparent just with the entry fee.

Some 1,000 of the world's largest businesses pay 42,500 Swiss francs ($39,000 euros, US$60,700) apiece for annual membership to the exclusive club—not counting the extra 11,000 euros per person to attend the Davos meeting that's open to the media only.

Around 100 multinational bodies even an even further yearly fee of 215,000 euros for the role of "strategic partner" of the forum and to lobby politicians to improve the world—a goal generally backed up by no less a thing than a pledge to "improve the state of the world."

Not without any shortage of subject material. Some 200 debates are scheduled, running on subjects ranging from Pakistan to cancer.

But once—the grim sum of the world's economy—is certain to dominate both formal and informal talks among the hordes of industry and government.

Founded 37 years ago by former business professor Klaus Schwab, the private forum gathers the year 27 heads of state and governments and 113 ministers.

Google party

The 2008 attendees include Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

The forum is not always just a chat session.

Davos hosted a key, 1992 meeting between South Africa's apartheid-era President F.W. de Klerk and then-detained Nelson Mandela.

The first ministerial meetings between Middle East Israeli leader Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat took place here in 2000, along with a 1988 declaration signed between Greece and Turkey, which ostensibly turned the two countries back from the brink of war.

With its myriad of cocktails, swap meets and other entertainment, Davos is not all about business. Over the last few years, the party hosted by Google has been particularly sought after. AFP

A GATHERING OF WORLD'S POLITICAL AND BUSINESS ELITE That's the Davos forum for short. The World Economic Forum opens on the ski resort in Switzerland on Wednesday. —AFP

Surprise US rate cut lifts Asian markets

From page B1

markets said the market instead would linger for some time because the Fed's emergency action was seen to be sonic in an indication that American authorities viewed the US credit crunch as a very serious problem.

"The Fed's action provided a very positive surprise," said Tsuyoshi Segawa, manager at Daiwa Securities Co. in Tokyo. "But people are also starting to think that things may be so bad they needed to act."

Surge

In Hong Kong, the Hang Seng index surged 3.67 percent—its biggest gain in 16 years—to 24,999.17, regaining much of the 11.7 percent it had shed over the previous two days.

Japan's Nikkei 225 Stock Index rose 2 percent to close at 12,820.98 after warning 9.3 percent the previous two days, while India's Sensex was up 5.7 percent in afternoon trading, morphing nearly half its 12 percent losses on Monday and Tuesday.

Singapore's Straits Times Index rose 2.5 percent to close at 12,820.98 after warning 9.3 percent the previous two days, while India's Sensex was up 5.7 percent in afternoon trading, morphing nearly half its 12 percent losses on Monday and Tuesday.

In Seoul, the Composite Stock Index closed 3.6 percent earlier this week, bounced back 5.1 percent, and stock-index market rebounded 9.4 percent, snapping a 11-day losing streak.

In Manila, the Philippine Stock Exchange Index climbed 793.58 points, or 11.7 percent, to close at 7,580.26, after rising as much as 13 percent early in the session. It had plunged 5.3 percent to a five-month low on Tuesday and another 10.6 percent before its close at the end of last year. (See story in Business, Page B1.)

Fears of a US recession, which would likely erode demand for Asian exports, have battered the region's markets since the start of the year.

The sell-offs accelerated on Monday and Tuesday amid skepticism that a stimulus package announced by US President George W. Bush on Friday would prevent the American economy from overheating.

Fed slashes rates

Jolted by worries of a global recession, the Fed on Tuesday slashed its federal funds rate three quarters of a percentage point to 3.5 percent, the biggest reduction in the target rate by overnight loans on records going back to 1990. It also was the first time the Fed has changed rates between meetings since 2001.

On Wall Street, the Fed's move initially appeared to help. Tuesday plunged more than 400 points initially but recouped most of its losses as the day progressed to close at 11,971.19, down 128.11 points, or 1.1 percent.

It's much easier for many, however, to decide a modest drop when Wall Street opens on Wednesday's trading at 1400 GMT (10:30 p.m. in Manila). Dow futures were down 46 points, or 0.3 percent, to 11,915. Standard & Poor's 500 futures were down 5.5 points, or 0.4 percent, to 1,303.8.

Europe's major stock markets also turned weaker on Wednesday after posting solid gains at the opening following hints from the European Central Bank that it was not about to cut rates from record levels.

In Frankfurt, the key DAX-30 percent index was under target of 6,607 points, while in Paris the CAC-40 shed 4.2 percent, a drop enabled from its 2.29 percent gain at the start of trade. The London FTSE slipped 2.27 percent to 5,522.78 following a jump of 0.99 percent on the start.

Further rate cut

Investors in Asia were already betting in another US rate cut of as much a half-point when the Fed holds its regular meeting on Jan. 29-30. But whether such a move will work to help could ride both if Wall Street continued to decline in coming sessions.

In Hong Kong, where the benchmark index had plunged 22 percent since the start of the year through Tuesday, investors took heart from the US rate cut and snapped up stocks that had fallen to attractive levels. (See related story on Page A7.)

Francis Lun, a general manager at Fullerton Securities, estimated that the Hong Kong market had been oversold by about 15 percent.

"It's time to recover, but investors still need to be cautious because the fundamentals now is too big," Lun said.

Asian-based companies welcomed the Fed's move, too.

"Anything that helps consumer sentiment is good for our business," said Vincent Bockaert, president of Li & Fung, a Hong Kong-based exporter that sources products for major brands and retailers worldwide, including Wal-Mart stores Inc.

"From a psychological effect, it has given people in the US an issue comfort that the government will do whatever they can to solve this crisis," Bockaert said.

Fed move insufficient

Still, analysts warned that lower interest rates won't fix bad credit problems—and usually take several months to have an effect on an economy.

"We consider the Fed's rate cut still insufficient for the global financial markets to completely recover and help the Japanese stocks to fully rebound," Credit Suisse chief strategist Shinichi Ichikawa said.

Despite the modest rebound in top cities, other traders and analysts remain on red alert over US recession fears.

"There are still concerns around a potential US recession, there are also concerns around a potential US slowdown," Hearne said, adding that the FTSE 100 "can down by 13 percent in value so far this year."

The other thing to add into the mix is the continuing fallout from the US subprime crisis," he added.

Subprime credit woes and a looming slump have added to investor concerns that the US economy will shrink in the months ahead.

Whiff of panic

In its online edition, the Economist magazine said the hope and unexpected cut by Federal Reserve chief Ben Bernanke had a "whiff of panic" about it and that market sentiment appeared to be shifting for the worse.

"The size of the cut also brings more fear than comfort," it added.

The US economy has been hit by the ongoing mortgage debacle, by "subprime" customers who never issued loans during the last housing boom despite patchy credit histories. Reports from AP and AFP

US recession expected to hit RP economy hard

From page B1

traffic violations at the corner of Mabini Avenue and De la Rosa Street.

Life in the Philippines and other parts of the world is about to take a turn for the worse, especially if the United States slips into recession, defined as two consecutive quarters of economic contraction.

A full-blown US recession has the ability to drag down the Philippine economy because of its local procurement ties that local businesses are now key dependent on the North American export market for their revenues, according to economist Cayetano Paderanga.

"While it may be true that we are doing more and more business with China or Europe now than, you must remember that those sectors are still there good ears to the US," Paderanga said.

Economy US has been the top export we said early this is but also indirectly through our other trading partners," he said.

Paderanga said if this happened, local businesses would likely experience lower revenues, prompting them to make production or layoffs or have to lay off workers or worse.

Call centers and OFWs

Call centers and overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) could be the hardest hit, he said, as companies and households in the world economy independent think tank Ibon Foundation said yesterday.

Ibon research head Sonny Africa said the country's economy would be hurt by a US economic slowdown because of the growing ties with the world's biggest economy.

In a statement, Africa said the United States was one of the country's top investment and exports partners. It accounted for around 32 percent of total approved foreign direct investment in the first semester of 2007 and 17 percent of total Philippine exports from January to November 2007.

Little country can do

Business leaders warned there was little the country could do to ward off the effects of a US recession, except to prepare itself for greater challenges ahead.

"We are projecting only flat growth this year for the country. But if the United States might slip into recession," said Ernie Santiago, president of the business group Investment Electronics Industries Philippines Inc.

"We hope it will not be worse than 2001, that it will be a soft recession," he said, recalling that in 2001, Philippine electronic exports slipped by almost 20 percent.

Electronics make up about 60 percent of total Philippine exports and Santiago said electronic exports now by only about 5 percent in 2007.

Few options

The industry has few options in the face of a US recession, he warned, saying that such an event would affect the electronics industry worldwide. "If the US market fails, it will be the same throughout the world," he said.

Fernando Libiran, president of PCCI Investments, said private enterprise economies would almost certainly feel the impact of the weakening US economy and may see their own economies contract, reducing earnings and consequently, joint subsidiaries.

Finance Secretary Margarito Teves said he hoped the US Federal Reserve's emergency cut in interest rates of 75 basis points would calm investor nerves.

The full effects of any US recession will hit the country's overseas workers, however, after a period of time rather than all at once.

DAY AFTER THE FALL It still looks gloomy at the Philippine Stock Exchange a day after the stocks plunged worldwide. —REUTERS

A rule of thumb among economists is that to calculate around six months for the full effects of a US recession to filter through the Philippine economy, said Paderanga, a former socioeconomic planning secretary.

But he also pointed out that some sectors would feel the ill effects a lot sooner, like the local household sector, which is already reeling from the global stock market slump.

"The investors are what's happening and many of them are bound to sell [their investments] at time," he said.

Higher interest rates

The Philippine Stock Exchange, which fell 5.3 percent on Tuesday, when markets throughout the world tumbled, recovered by 11.7 percent on Wednesday, partly due to bargain-hunting and partly due to the Federal Reserve's rate cut.

The other measured effect down the road is a potential spike in domestic interest rates, once a weaker Philippine economy results in lower government revenues, pressuring fiscal authorities to borrow more from commercial sources, which will result in banks charging higher fees for their funds.

"Higher interest rates will hit everyone because money will become expensive," he said.

The economist also pointed out that countries like the Philippines—which are heavily dependent on foreign investments—are at risk once fund managers decide to repatriate their assets to compensate for the losses they incurred during the US subprime crisis.

The business process outsourcing (BPO) sector, which is led by call centers, may experience job losses and pressure on wages to fall, and that same may happen to US subcontractors in the country's import processing zones, according to Africa.

The effect would be magnified further by how many of Philippine exports to East Asia are in turn, with the United States being the ultimate destination.

Major US firms with BPO operations in the Philippines include Accenture, Aon and MG, while the US accounts for 14 percent of the total investments in export processing zones from 1995 to 2005.

Remittances, too

OFW remittances would also likely drop, which would further hurt the country's growth by denting domestic consumption.

Africa pointed out that although the United States was not a top destination of OFWs, most of the employing countries depend on US investments, such as trade centers like Hong Kong and oil-producing countries like Saudi Arabia.

Further, OFW deployments may drop when a slowdown in world economic growth, which has been slowing from 5.4 percent in 2007 to an expected 5.2 percent in 2007 and 4.6 percent in 2008.

Real estate bubble

Those developments may act as to result in a banning of the domestic real estate bubble, which has been driven mainly by OFWs' demand for housing and cold economy for office space.

"If there is a recession of the fixed rents as a result of the slowdown, if there's less retail action, the country could experience a steep economic slowdown in the coming years," Africa said.

For Mapua public info Emilio, however, life is already difficult even under the present economic situation. As it is, he could barely make ends meet on the P6,500 he earns each month.

"Prices of goods are rising, and the prices of goods are high," he said. "I also have to help send my siblings to school, and pay for power and water bills that's on top of the rent."

Often, I have to resort to borrowing money," he added.

Official pronouncement

He said he was not familiar with the state of the economy, and he especially could not reconcile official pronouncements that the economy was growing briskly with the reality that he was seeing on the ground.

"It might get even worse," he. He added, incidentally concerning the issue for that is occurring the needs of economists and policymakers worldwide. With a report from AFP

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INQUIRER

OPINION

Your opinion matters

Original sin

THE FARMERS FROM SUMILAO, BUKIDNON, ARE back, and they are calling on President Macapagal-Arroyo to keep her word. Will she hear them, above the cocktail chatter and the rattle of speeches in Davos, Switzerland? In large part, the answer depends on the country's Catholic bishops, currently meeting in Manila.

The issue, as Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales has said, is justice. Do the Sumilao farmers have the legal right to the land they claim as their own? The Davide Supreme Court had ruled otherwise, but also laid down an essential condition for the landowner's (semi-)development of the property, according to the landowner's own grandiose plans, within five years. That condition was not met; in fact, it is possible to argue that the landowner had no intention to meet it, that the plans were merely a legal tactic, to exclude the disputed land from the ambit of agrarian reform. The property has since been sold to San Miguel Foods, a subsidiary of one of the country's oldest and largest companies.

EDITORIAL

In a just world, the failure to meet the court-imposed condition should have led to the return of the 144-hectare property to Sumilao farmers for agrarian reform coverage—and thus to the farmers who had tilled the land. That, in brief, was the expectation the President herself raised, when she met with the farmers last month. Her decision to revoke the controversial 1996 conversion order and put the land back under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program offered the farmers real hope, for the first time in a decade.

But the issue is also about development. Or, rather, the moral foundations of development. Do we pursue progress even when it is built or based on a crime?

San Miguel Foods has apparently offered the farmers an alternative plan, that will protect its investment in San Vicente while at the same time allowing them to own their own land, but in another, adjacent property. We say apparently, because aside from unofficial statements, the most specific form of the offer, according to Manila Archbishop Broderick Pabillo, was decidedly vague. "The offer was not clear," he said. "It was not even a formal offer since we only talked about it over the phone. We cannot negotiate without any details."

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that there is such an offer, and that the offer, considering San Miguel's impressive track record and traditional commitment to the communities in which it operates, is materially advantageous to the farmers. Let us even assume that it is much more advantageous than any farmer-led development of the Sumilao property we can contemplate. Is that sufficient reason to look the other way, when the law on agrarian reform has been violated?

To ask that question is to realize that the Sumilao case is ultimately about something even more basic than land. It is about our dignity as men and women who are free to choose, a dignity rooted, the bishops may well say now and as "Gaudium et Spes" reminded us then, in the very image of God. If the farmers choose what a materialistic world may consider the lesser portion, what of it? Is their choice necessarily invalid because it sets them less money? Developments cannot be sustainable if it is founded on the original sin of injustice.

Unofficial statements suggest that San Miguel will consider a pullout of its investments in Sumilao grossly unreasonable. All the more reason then for it to stop construction of new infrastructure.

As a necessary next step to her revocation order, the President is morally obligated to issue a cease-and-desist order to San Miguel Foods—if, that is, she holds herself morally responsible not only for what she does but also for what she says. On this matter, the bishops, speaking as one, can give her the benefit of their experiences—they know what it means to work through the sentences and spoken word.

Already, much of the goodwill the President's revocation order generated has dissipated, especially after the farmers learned that Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye failed to keep his dramatic promise to hand deliver the order to San Miguel Foods. In a case where the system itself is at issue, the country's poor only have the sincerity of their officials to rely on. Perhaps the bishops can issue a first pastoral reminder about our duty not only to keep the faith, but to keep our word.

Publisher Isaac Tanco
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'Memory holes'

VIEWPOINT

Juan L. Mercado

DID THE 14TH PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINES mimic the 13th (and busted out) President?

That question arises from this Statement Paradox: Macapagal-Arroyo set off by proscribing, for national security reasons, a hefty dose of amnesia. "Forget Erap II," she urged, "instead focus all of memory-world "bad wounds."

Nine-day daily bomp even original? Hey back the September 1998 Luisa Amerikan state visit by her predecessor. When Joseph Estrada reached down to hotdogs, people here were reading the 13th anniversary of Ninoy L. de la Cielo grappling with remnants of candlelit rites. Seeing, the press published reports on "Erap's People Power."

"Why do we commemorate dark years in our history?" Erap snapped. "Again, stop rage, purge at solitude fight episodes in our past, like martial law, ought to be forgotten." Why should we remember?

"We should move on," President Arroyo reproached. Only a fifth of it, left this the same team commission here play when asked about their purges of the late 1980s? Over 1,400 were slaughtered in these communal pogroms, from "Cadena de Amor" to the Bloody Sunday rallies in 1982 to "Olympia" in Mendiola in 1986.

A "Cambodia Revolution" devoured its own children, noted historian Ben. J. Kiernan. Relatively, massacre "campaigns" were killed without provocation of trials. Their initiators lie in unmarked graves, mourned only by friends. Pol Pot's forces butchered Cambodia's "killing fields." Some executioners are today barrio chiefs hoping to overcome social conditioned Hindi Muslim ethos.

"Why remember the (20th pogrom)?" pressed the Commission Hero of the Philippines fo an article published in Inquirer's Opinion page on Feb. 1, 2008. "The party already condemned the abuses," wrote Amie Bautzmanova of the party's information bureau, it "rectified" the mistakes.

But not the party-shredded names of the victims and the histories of their graves. Their dirty bones were not a bag.

Indeed, amnesia hasn't consolidate injustice, it erodes in the "dictature prevention" achieved is called good. Spontaneous reports aside from, those on guardians of memory had formerly formalized to restore reported abuses, closing every violation.

In a Cebu Daily News column, titled "Speak memory," Ellinore Dudaña recalled what the historian Milan Hubbl stressed. "The first step to liquidating a people is to erase its memory." (Look at how the Marcos puppet projects to rewrite the history of People Power.)

"Remember memory," urged Dudaña, now a judge. "For so long as people remember their dissidents at the hands of tyrants, there is little chance of tyranny reappearing." Then, we ignore, as we pay it, forgetfulness does worse; from worship of the spirit.

"The Philippines seems caught in a long nightmare between remembering and forgetting," Alfred McCoy told the Asian-American Free Labor Institute's conference on "Memory, Truth-Telling and the Pursuit of Justice." The country lacked itself into a state of destructive self-seeking institutions. This enabled "remains of Marcos era to use certain police and intelligence agencies, allowing the persistent brutality of martial law to persist. Failed impunity, a culture of politics including the past, including crimes from amnesiac, torturers into legislators and killers into generals. Because the welfare of a criminal democracy, the Philippines still suffers from the "culture of impunity" that is the most lasting legacy of unrestrained habits of human rights abuse."

Today's decreasing trust in the rule of an pares is a consequence.

Instead, and Jacinto urge us to think John down the memory hole. "They're twins," "successors Randy David explains. But he sends it getting "the quest the accountable government."

Is that why the 14th President of the Philippines sounds exactly like the 13th (and busted out) President?

E-mail: jmercado@gmail.com

Kindling fire

THERE'S THE RUB

Gemma de Quiroz

SOME THREE OR FOUR YEARS AGO, I WAS looking for an IT expert who could design something I had in mind. That was an "electronic book," something that was the size and weight of a paperback and that could be logged around just as easily. That seemed to me like the most convenient substitute or replacement of books in this digital age.

The computer industry, of course, already has electronic books, featuring information page or more for reading and writing. And laptops are also capable of playing books in digital form to supply you with other functions like music and video.

But you can't read a laptop like a book. You can't tuck it between the fingers of one hand while balancing your head on its telephone ear or slouching on a couch in the living room. It's heavy and cumbersome. You can't read clothes. It's not a footwear you have to sit up straight to do so. With a book, you can take any position you like short of the "Kamasutra."

And the reading habit in this country just isn't (due to no fault of its own). All the battery books require is the one residing in you. You get "low bat," you can always doze off and pick up where you left off when you wake up.

What I had in mind was something that would be just as light and handy as a paperback. Its sole function would be for reading, with room for some video and audio for purposes of surfing (electronic) encyclopedias. I told my IT friends what I envisioned was something like the "Sagip Alma." The thing had great dual-band that you never see with a modern gizmo where its setting disappeared when you pulled up the plastic sheet that covered the buttons and numerals. Some 2.4 GB of hard disc would suffice, now that the latest hungry for space of my data. The screen should look exactly like a book page. Maybe it could even stand like a book, I said, remembering that some Upline users lamented the smell of a freshly printed page coming the price of reading books.

Its advantage over present books is patent. For one, a real accommodates a hundred or so books, if not an entire library. That is no small feather to modify us, seasoned relatives in a letter to the Inquirer. "We should not stop reminiscing and remembering," they said.

"All of us must remember . . . and open our hearts to human memory," Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel insisted at memorial rites in the Gestapo death camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he had been imprisoned. "I do not want my past to become the future . . . of our children's generation."

Filipinos have "a very special problem" in recalling, former de Manila University president Bienvenido Nebres, S.J. observed. "It is our last wrong memories. It is the lack of a national memory . . . The consequence is, we continue to live in a perpetual present. We have little collective memory of the past and that we can not see well into the future."

In his novel "1984," George Orwell depicted a country where citizens devise into a "memory hole" anything that strained the value of rulers. So "memory holes" destroyed unsanctioned, wrong become right, but replaced truth, and freedom turned into slavery.

Like reading devices, "doomed one memories don't stay buried up. They refuse to daily life. Thus, besides Marcos' heirs that shot Benigno's assassin was the "most democratic period in our history." The administration's line that "many of (opposition) victims decided to continue their struggle" were probably true enough. *Hoy! Well*, some days he can't recall if he name is you wrinkle.

Pampanga Gov. Eduardo Panlilio revealed that a biohacking staffer threw P900,000 to his backside. Office who provided the extra morning couldn't recollect anything—and

Thinking for anyone who has ferried over what books to tuck inside the hand-carried bag on a flight. Certainly, it's always a challenge for me to throw who break their backs lugging huge items by class.

Just as well, you can always dump the lost and no sun. The fine memory if you're having about the texture of a page (which I can't, and the sound of it as you're turning over and find it hard to at to read small fonts (which I can too, though I don't greatly mind smaller fonts through the years of reading glasses).

I am flawed. Maybe you could forgive me for being pooling the kids in mind in the meantime they're used to. They're used to the PC (or iPod) because, they're not used to books. If you can't bring Muhammad to the mountain, you can bring the mountain to Muhammad.

Also, my friends could only see the difficulties involved in such a concept, but most having to pay Bill Gates a fortune for the use of Microsoft Word unless you can devise a reading software of your own. Even more, also, had gone into the imaginative realm of those things that he did not happily use with the advent of and to get on them. So now instead of being a being a billionaire enjoying summers in Sorsogon, *I'm still a workhorse pounding on the keyboard* to earn my keep. And the prospect of acquiring untold wealth for that reason is gone forever.

But now comes Amazon has produced this electronic book it is called Kindle.

It's all-white, lighter than a paperback, and has a lot on screen that looks exactly like book paper with buttons below for the commands. It has a keyboard, too. Its battery can last for a week and recharge in a couple of hours. It has wireless connection which allows you to order from 90,000 titles available in Amazon, including on-screen bestsellers, and to subscribe to the major magazines. The book orders are typically from $9.4 to (though some can more) and are delivered within a minute. Amazon has a permanent library you can build your books for you when you decide to remove some titles to make room for new ones. Or you can store them in your PC.

Kindle will mean a penny pinning—$399 —though not surprisingly Amazon expects that it is extremely out of mind because of beauty demand (now I'm reckoned). I'll just wait for the price to come down a bit before joining the bandwagon. Interest will indeed, surely, including Tom Matsuzaka and Neil Gaiman are already hooked.

I don't know that it will spell the end of books as we know it, but I suspect we're in for a bumpy ride as publishing of the mid. Sure of like the typewriter when the PC came along. Most of my genera, even will probably cling to the printed book for some time to come. Nothing will substitute from watching PC screens will remind the most of my kids' generation won't (they've discovered non-glare LCD screens). Even now I can see in stores on local bookstores, and I do hope they prosper for it. You can order books in-store, naturally and have a wide variety of fun to choose from (we lack non-fiction books in they're horribly expensive), you won't bother leaving the traffic and digging deep into your pockets to send of local mail.

On the other hand, I can also see an easier local industry rising on the strength of it. That's an army of shoulder carrying our textbooks for entering this is. All you'll need to go to class is a Kindle (or whatever takes from the enormous book today). That's something a big computers will not think of, and I suspect all sorts of huge losses to fight piracy via peer-to-peer services will be frustrating.

In the meanwhile, who knows? Maybe it can rekindle love of reading among those of us who have left the fire untended. Or kindled it among those who have yet to discover the joys of that zest.

Clearer rules of engagement

LAST SUNDAY evening, CECILE ALABASTRO and I interviewed PGP Director General Avelino Razon over our daily program, where he said one issue didn't have the opportunity to set on the media's misperception on the PNP's containment of press freedom, "in no one can bind your rights to the police." He spoke too soon. The following day (Monday), end of story—Ellen Tordesillas, Inq.net's star correspondent Jon Dobol, filed a petition asking the Supreme Court to stop the police from harassing or threatening to arrest members of the media "in the exercise of their profession." The petition was granted by the high court the next day, and in a resolution, that he was glad the case was filed so that the Court can define the parameters of our idol's freedoms and the police's duty to protect the participants.

In our interview, the PNP chief stressed that while he thanks the Peninsula takeover by rebel soldiers was going on, police researchers checked the Internet for particular phrases used by the United States and the United Kingdom, where members of the media were told to move during crisis situations, (he said their research showed that cases were filed against the police in less than 10 days). He said that in the Peninsula incident, the area is crowded the more inflow of the police. "That strengthened our resolve to enforce our order to ensure the [no] passing," he admitted, not, "that we are trying to restrict the coverage because we're afraid" and the police and military forces couldn't have allowed the situation to deteriorate. We asked him whether the police had presented the jurisprudence on media behavior during crisis situations to the said PNP officers, and he answered in the affirmative.

* * *

Now what a problem has been filed before the Court, the PNP will have the opportunity to clarify media prerogatives. Actually, I myself first filed that media-talimagan filed it, as this should result in clearer rules of engagement between those who trade-identify adversarial groups. We [illegible] Defense/Military Relations as Warm-Hearty Differences," or 2 p.m. at Powerbooks in Greenbelt 4 in Makati.

It's a small book with a big heart and it features 11 "ordinary" Filipinos (ages individuals and a couple) who made a difference in their little corner of the world and tells about how this difference created ripples that reached and touched the lives of many. Some of the stories are heroic and astonishing, doing what needed to be done under the odds, but you, despite the age—the young ages—of some of them.

The featured ordinary Filipinos are Jaime Aristotle Bautista ("Small Lots that Can Count a Long Way"), Alexander ("Champion, Mentor, Friend"), Jeanne Sipe ("A Visionary Journey in Cell Images"), John Bardenley Ong ("A Man for Others"), Imelda Lopez ("Legacy of Wonder"), Jessica Soho ("Making Sense Out of Making a Difference"), Otoño Pagsanghan ("A Journey of Hope"), Jeanne Frances Ilagan ("Between Three Countries: The Power of Hardship").

I read the book in one sitting. As diverse as the stories are, they all have one thing in common: they are stories of ordinary people who have made a difference for others and even the lives of ones—literal courage in a new commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one renewal, vital quality of those who seek to change a world that often seems painfully unchange...

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cassiano

Lakbay Sa explained that as class patter clearing operations were not yet completed, as the police didn't have the luxury of time. In fact, he pointed out that after the media group was transported to Bataan, the police still managed to capture two English suspects, dressed as civilians but fully armed inside the hotel premises. Imagine, he said, if shooting had occurred while the media group was being interviewed by the police or any of them was held hostage by escaped rebels. Incredible point.

* * *

I followed with great interest the election protest filed with the Presidential Electoral Tribunal by Sen. Loren Legarda against Vice President Noli de Castro, especially because the key point in our quadrant was already being raised. How do the integrity of the votes obtained by President Macapagal-Arroyo. I noted that the PET was under the control of the president's allies, in terms of caseload and election returns from Cebu, but it is counted the ballots themselves. A year and a half ago, I opined that if Legarda's allegations of fraud in Cebu, particularly massive, were proven, the margin for GMA and almost as much for De Castro, based on margin for lack of evidence, then the allegations against GMA would have to be regarded in this without doubt, since the two cases involved the very same COCs, IBs and ballots. Moreover, the case against De Castro was rejected virtually based for word from the charge against GMA.

It turned out that not a single recount from Cebu's 10,000 precincts was questioned by Legarda's lawyers, so the PET went on to Pampanga where she was asked to put up the P3.5 million required for revision expenses. When Legarda didn't come up with that money, the PET had no alternative but to order a few precincts in Cebu, Maguindanao and Pampanga. Election lawyer Romulo Macalintal, who handled both Estrada and De Castro's cases, insists that Legarda's camp's failure to recount the Cebu votes means that the documents of GMA's election are as valid as those of De Castro's. If fraud was discovered in the MVs ballots, he added, would the opposition not have raised it with COMELEC?

* * *

Regarding Legarda's claim that she didn't have the P3.5 million for her Pampanga protest, Macalintal pointed out, that senator who topped the elections in 2007, had spent P100 million to land her 2007 candidacy, and that, she could easily have raised the P3.5 million sought by the PET. His former added that Legarda's funding for the Senate in 2007 was a harbinger of her supporters' trust in her anti-fraud advocacy. But it should be noted that other politicians readily abandoned their own protests, once they saw a chance of winning, most notably Vice President Teofisto Guingona, who abandoned his protest in the 1992 elections and won a Senate seat later.

* * *

If reports flooding in for months that the President is set to appoint retired Justice Jose Melo to the helm of the Commission on Elections are true, then that is not encouraging news. As I have noted before, Melo has an indefensible reputation, that I find hard to fathom. He presided over the Manila Jai Alai Corporation, which experienced 200,000 pinoys throughout the country, involving at least 800,000 personnel. Such a damning profile has the capacity of a small insurgent group, the if DBM is really set on appointing him, then that is all the more reason the dismal opposite younger people of social integrity in the run other current posts in Comelec Commission Chairman of the Joint Committee on Public Order and Safety, Rep. Antonio Nachura, an unanimous signatory for their colleague, Leila de Lima.

Living the dream

MY SISTER LALA AND MY CLOSEST FRIENDS KNOW HOW much I looked forward to being a mom. It was my biggest dream in life. I dreamt of having a healthy baby girl whom I would dress up and bring along on children's parties, malls and out-of-town trips. I knew that being a mom would be the best role I would ever have and that I would enjoy it tremendously.

When Erin was born, I took great pleasure in taking care of her every need. Feeding, bathing, playing and cuddling her to sleep is my favorite way to relax for the two months I was on maternity leave. I initially thought that I could be with her 24 watching was problem and going mad—until the overwhelming urges of Erin's love disease.

I still vividly remember the dream part. I felt upon hearing the doctor tell us at around 10 a.m. on Aug. 14, 2006 that Erin had biliary atresia. But I believed in my heart that she would be normal and well after her first surgery.

When I talked to my husband Ricky after the meeting the doctors opened up our baby's little body. I didn't know how to react or what to say. I was paralyzed with fear for our little angel.

Just as Ronny and I were coming to grips ourselves up and adjust to having a child with a serious medical condition, the disappointing news came that the first surgery was a failure and that a liver transplant would be necessary. We were utterly devastated for the second time. But, by God's grace, we found strength again to move forward and prepared for a complicated and costly transplant.

We were finally getting excited to live a living donor transplant in June this year when our sure informed of the unexpected rejection of Erin's case by Chang Gung Hospital Taiwan. This destroyed us to the end as it came at a time when Erin had to be confined in the hospital again, and every day her condition seemed to be deteriorating. She urgently needed a new liver. It was devastating. But we knew we couldn't just give up. Among all of us in the family, he was the one who resented the hardest blow as he was always the one whom the doctors would talk to after Erin's every episodes. The doctors have told him many times to prepare the family for Erin's imminent passing.

Through all these, Ronny remained strong in faith and never limited to sending my pain over our daughter's condition, he kept me going. Friends would often tell me that I didn't look so stressed and pronounced despite the ordeal we were going through. I can now say that this was all because of family, for each were good care of me for past three months.

Even during the most frightening moments, he made sure that we are all our "hospital meals" together. He would always find a way to make me feel alive better, be it as simple as the doctors bring breakfast treat from our favorite eatery in the mall or only my mind could not see. As always, no matter I wasn't swimming into a career to talk about. During those long days when Erin was having intermittent low-grade fevers in the hospital, he would stay up all night and monitor Erin's vital signs, so I'd have the point of mind to sleep undisturbed.

I can truly attested when the husband draws the energy and ability to come up with a funny joke or remark amid our darkest moments. He remained positive and pleasant all the time, yet he never ignores false hopes.

Through all these, my helpless emotions are supervised, the thought that "God put me in charge" in his master-life gave me strength. A part of me knew that in always, he would be able to come up with something to exercise our situation. True to faith, he constantly searched for the best treatment for Erin. Someone in Manila family called him "Dr. Ronny" as he would always search and research for Erin's liver disease cause and even suggest a plan of action. When Erin's rat blood cells dropped unreasonably despite multiple transfusions, he did some research and came across a drug that could possibly help the production of red blood cells. He brought this up with Erin's doctors and they agreed to give a shot.

Despite advice that I gave life to Erin for the second time by donating a part of my liver, I think it was Ronny who gave life to Erin this time around. It was he who made the step to this gigantic possible against all odds. He just would not accept that Erin's story will end this way. He just refused to become the single one who survives the flight and the story were to continuing. With only a few days to spare, he made all the arrangements to bring Erin to Singapore. He was certain that if Erin would be put on a plane to Singapore, she would have a great chance to live.

After the very tough ride we have been through, I am now enjoying every moment I have with our baby girl, feeding, bathing, playing and putting her to sleep. It's like being a new mother all over again. I am living my dream now and Ronny made it happen.

Thank you, Lord, for the wonderful blessing.

Ma. Alee Pastores, 32, graduated from the doctors of thirds and worked as a branch manager in the field of Philippine banks until she resigned to look after her ailing daughter, Erin. She is also married to husband Ron management in Quezon Metropolitan in Singapore recently.

YOUNG BLOOD

Rio Alma Pastores

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the [illegible] and below. — Ed.

NOTICE TO YOUNGBLOOD CONTRIBUTORS

Send your contributions by e-mail to youngblood@gmail.com, and please include with your address, age and the school, course and year you're studying at, if employed, the position you're holding and the company you work with. Contributions to Youngblood should not have been previously published.

Ordinary Filipinos, extraordinary difference

A FREE, TOMORROW, IF YOU HAVE THE chance, go to the launching of the book, "Profiles in Courage: Ordinary Filipinos Making an Extraordinary Difference," at 5 p.m. at Powerbooks in Greenbelt 4 in Makati.

It's a small book with a big heart and it features 11 "ordinary" Filipinos (ages individuals and a couple) who made a difference in their little corner of the world and tells about how this difference created ripples that reached and touched the lives of many. Some of the stories are heroic and astonishing, doing what needed to be done under the odds, but you, despite the age—the young ages—of some of them.

The featured ordinary Filipinos are Jaime Aristotle Bautista ("Small Lots that Can Count a Long Way"), Alexander ("Champion, Mentor, Friend"), Jeanne Sipe ("A Visionary Journey in Cell Images"), John Bardenley Ong ("A Man for Others"), Imelda Lopez ("Legacy of Wonder"), Jessica Soho ("Making Sense Out of Making a Difference"), Otoño Pagsanghan ("A Journey of Hope"), Jeanne Frances Ilagan ("Between Three Countries: The Power of Hardship").

I read the book in one sitting. As diverse as the stories are, they all have one thing in common: they are stories of ordinary people who have made a difference for others and even the lives of ones—literal courage in a new commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one renewal, vital quality of those who seek to change a world that often seems painfully unchange...

HUMAN FACE

Ma. Ceres P. Doyo

The book is dedicated to the late Raul S. Roco who had once asked, "What is it in the mind of a young boy from Bulacan that tells us the Filipino is worth dying for?" (he was referring to a lad who turned down dying a disaster and in the end had to [illegible]).

The 30 stories tell us that the Filipino is also worth living for.

Why are up to microbiologist prepare that would "help the poor" by inventing test kits for dengue fever, leaders for success of microloans and set up the Center for Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD), the musician who gave hope to a street scene, say that [illegible] worthwhile.

Inspirational was already a current buzzer where he found his calling to become scientist and teacher, teen who were growing up to be men, the story to add to the accomplished, successful men without his [illegible] dying from [illegible], man whose character he had helped build.

Jesuit-educated Ong lived among the Mangyans and helped them with their academic dreams. A hefty paradigm, Ong also helped the Mangyans in their struggle for their ancestral lands as a political man, he was done to reach and also to learn "to love and to serve."

Couple Imelda and Javier Lagrada taught us how life is a people's first craft of weaving and made the world more. This not only gave communities livelihood, this restored the people's confidence everyone in their heritage.

Said doctor in intensive care, science teacher put together their effort to [illegible] that banished the fire Asian teacher to sets the land. Excellence is touching heart.

A hundred by the overwhelming year, compassion and sacrifice of Christ. MacDonell realized the best way to show her gratitude and appreciation for what God had given her was to be a servant herself. She left her corporate job and joined the Jesuit Volunteers Program, and went to Palawan. She later formed the JOHNS Empowering Our Basic Minded Fund to help more Indonesians access to good education.

There's more, for the book.

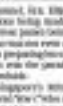
"Profiles Intercourse" (ANVIL Artist E Hidalgo and Alejandro Diamond), edition) is a project of the Jaspersen Publication Foundation, a cultural-social movement founded in 2002 for the radical transformation of the Philippines. Its mission is to raise leading but I wish the pieces were more even, less awkward and edited. Some parts are rather choppy. Still the project is a step in the right direction. More discussion of a similar book is needed.

In this age of dazzling stars and opinions being constantly hoisted up in the media firmament as idols, there is a need for alternative models with substance and values, courage and commitment.

Ambassador Jose Ma. Ledesma, Jesuit Volunteers Philippines executive director, describes the special individuals as "a significant group who have sought to use their skills, talents and vision to make dedicated change in the world, to open up the world to indigenous peoples... They have brought qualities like professionalism, discipline, accountability and competency."

I say, they are the individuals who are quietly carving the nation from rock, the heroes that is being as in great heights, the genes that are improving the Filipino stock. They are God's gift to us and to the world. To quote the Bard: "O wonderful, wonderful, and ever wonderful wonders of! and yet again wonderful..."

A familiar passage



THE LONG VIEW

Manuel L. Quezon III

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY'S SONNET "OZYMANdias" concludes with these lines:

And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

A Filipino raised with a classical education (a rarer and rarer thing), surely recalls these lines the moment he begins reminiscing the fanciful remnants of Ferdinand Marcos' extensive likeness. But one doesn't have to look at the fallen monuments of the dictator to see the lines. Indeed, the poem's underlying theme of poetic footprints, the phrases which run a further distance becomes enough, Marcos himself, the cited hated poet, died before he started a final [illegible] and continued it unspoiled.

Two of my favorite books, "The Emperor Downfall of an Autocrat," and "Gods of Blame," both by the late Raymond Kapuscinski, come to mind. The former chronicles the collapse of the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie's rule, and how in his final days, imprisoned before most palace, he spent his time telling words of truth from his commander interrogators. The latter chronicles the disposed Shah of Iran's wandering from country to country, savaged by rumors and disappointments alike.

Something to B.E. Rhein in "Babasics: A Political Biography" the former Indonesian dictator was [illegible] by Suharto's successors, and [illegible] [illegible] with badly-slurred speech, poor memory and unable to express or understand anything more than simple ideas. Dr. Rhein empty days [illegible] watching movies and documentaries on television, sleeping, and praying." His prayers, perhaps, were considerably answered. Few would doubt his intelligence, and the information source.

Dr. Rhein, rather than being suitably ignored as the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

Ninoy convicts: Will they tell the truth

THIS IS ABOUT THE HARDIN RUNG proposed for the 13 soldiers who were convicted and jailed for the murder of Sen. Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr.

First of all, I wish to express my admiration for former President Corazon Aquino who publicly forgave the convicted soldiers in the hope that someday they will tell the truth. On the other hand, Sen. Benigno "Beyenyo" Aquino III, deserves support for opposing the move to grant pardon to the convicts.

However, I agree with Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez that the grant of pardon should be based on the time served by the convicts in prison. But the fact that the "convicts will never admit their guilt" cannot be a basis for pardon. What if it was very evident, as in this case, that the convicts knew who really pulled the trigger? What if these convicts made a blood contract among themselves and swore unto death that they will never admit their guilt or point to who pulled the trigger and the mastermind?

There may be layers between them and the brains behind the operation, as stated by Sen. Juliet Arroyo with whom I fully agree with. How about the real triggerman who was among them, as found by the Agrava Commission? If the soldiers knew this they never knew who it was, then until now they are shielding the intelligence of the Filipino people. What about Rolando Galman and the ladies who were his friends and who disappeared and are now presumed dead?

As days are, the dead will no cares, but in this case, the lips of the living are forever closed, too.

If the authorities and the knowledgeable wish to solve the three-decade-old issue, let them ask former President Ferdinand Marcos, as he is

—LEOCADIO M. PEREZ, Tagaytay City

ASG: Always Suspect Group

"JESUS TAUGHT IN THIS TIME PRIESTS say." (Inquirer, 1/17/08) Maybe it's time to go down a bit in blaming the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) for the killing of 91 Boy Scouts in Tawi-Tawi.

We can go close in view of the recent Godvotes 2 Mati and Bataan bombing where the ASG were tagged as the mind-numbers. However, after further investigation, evidence showed that the ASG did not do it. The ASG has long unveiled from the Abu Sayyaf's decoy (ASG) the "honor" of being "the usual suspects" in every blast or bombing gone in the area.

Residents of Hula, Tawi-Tawi's neighbor province, will tell you that some of those killed there, adversarily or inadvertently, as a result of military operations have been tagged as MILF even if they were not. It is as if the ASG is historically everything bad that happens to the province. This, of course, is simply nonsense. But because of this "usual suspects" misfortune, there are those who, in case, wrongly direct the ASG presence and activities in Sulu, or the likelihood of some cooperation between ASG and MNLF elements with Misuri men.

Going back to the case of Father Bello, who was apparently vigorously racing a fleeting suspect when he was killed, it has become public knowledge in Sulu that certain bishop for common (IFR) syndrome based in the island runs many elections one in the ASG. (This was done purposely during the time of hostile-type commanders like the late Khaith Aminig ("Robot") and Majid Sawadjan, in a classic tribunal partnership. The ASG could then jack up the ransom demands because of the rapport.

Knowledgeable local sources say that the ASG in Sulu simply doesn't have the logistics to carry out big-time kidnappings. And it is not unscrupulously banned secret vendetta for police operations, it is kidding in interior hills.

Anyway, these are among the findings of South South Network (SSN) for Non-State Armed Group Engagement in a research on the ASG and other Philippine armed groups. It may be recalled that it was this research which produced Rudolfo Jacquinot's last interview. (Inquirer, 1/22/07) The point is that the research finding calls for a deeper investigation of the kinds (not only of knowledge) of the terrorists and the pursuit of justice.

The investigation and law enforcement could be done with the cooperation of the Moro liberation front through the Mindanao peace process and Muslim-Christian understanding, for which Father Bello gave his life, contributes to the solution of his case, lead to the arrest of his killers, and put an end to this senseless violence against persons of goodwill.

—SOLIMAN M. SANTOS JR., Regional Focal Point for Asia, South-South Network (SSN) for Non-State Armed Group Engagement, 38 Mariposa St., Cubao, Quezon City

CONVICTED: rapist Bureau Jalosjos at Muntinlupa Prison before his "release" last December

Jalosjos' pardon irrevocable under Revised Penal Code

FORMER SEN. ROMEO JALOSJOS WAS sentenced to two life terms in the 1990s for the rape of an 11-year-old girl. The sentences was commuted to 30 years by President Macapagal-Arroyo.

Bureau of Corrections officials have further reduced the prison term to 11 years based on Jalosjos' good conduct while prisoner. This would have allowed Jalosjos to leave prison on Dec. 26, 2007, based on the computation.

But Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez stopped the fine. He reason saying the Bureau of Corrections order was never approved by the President or himself. (Inquirer, 1/3/08)

The computation by the Bureau of Corrections officials of allowance for good conduct and special time for loyalty are based on the provisions of Articles 97 and 99 of the Revised Penal Code. The director of the Bureau of Corrections can grant such allowances under justifiable circumstances, and once the allowance is granted, it can no longer be revoked as provided for under Article 98 of the Revised Penal Code.

—GLICERIO M. PAYTIMEN, Barangka Subdivision, Concepcion I, Marikina City

Long on rhetoric, short on delivery

THE ARROYO ADMINISTRATION keeps on trumpeting the so-called unprecedented progress it has lined in its presence in the next one years, short is SWEEPER. However, some of these projects are either delayed, or have been shelved or halved for various reasons, among them for being short of funds. Among these projects are the long-delayed beginning of the Skin 3, the shelf-paved work on the Skyway extension along the South Luzon Expressway (SLEX), the stalled relocation of illegal settlers along the Banaklikad tracks.

To put in bluntly, the Arroyo administration is only good on rhetoric but poor or short on the delivery of its promises.

—PEDRO REFUERZO SR., 5737 Sgt.Gil., Makati City

Strange photo of hospitalized Villarosa

I WOULD LIKE TO COMMENT ON THE photo on the front page of the 26th. IT is one of the hospitals, admit-cleared former senator Jose Villarosa to refute claims that he was missing.

• If he was indeed in the hospital (Makati Med Recovery Room near ICU), why was he wearing a casual shirt and with a necktie, at that. Why was he not in a hospital gown?

• On undergoing a surgical operation right? If he was in fact in the Recovery Room, why was there no oxygen or IV line attached to his body?

Just an observation. Is Makati Med not following strict medical hygiene and sanitation procedures for its Recovery Room access to patients.

—KERA ANTHONY LLANOS, kirkandrewllanos@yahoo.com

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Axe Syjuco, President GMA urged

TOURISM DIRECTOR GENERAL Augusto "Bobby" Syjuco should be admitted of himself for disliking that he is the best person to head the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda). ("Not to scrap Tesda gains," inquirer.net, 1/16/08)

The records would show that Tesda's image has been tarnished almost irreparably as a result of many questionable transactions under Syjuco's dubious leadership. He should account for the millions of pesos in public funds that he funneled to his private foundation, which no credible benefits to the public. See http://www.scribd.com/pdf/doc/pdf/public/BARTES and Tesda under Department of Labor and Employment for CY 2006)

During his incumbency, funds for training in mentioned skills were diverted to the Tesda Isulo office and used for personal purposes. As a result, thousands of POs/graduates remain deprived of the skills training that would have landed them jobs. He has also harassed union leaders who dared to expose his illegal transactions.

The Presidential Anti-Graft Commission (PAGC) can question him, involving the P9.2-million accountability transaction for the printing of the "Tesdaman for the Filipino Youth," to just the tip of the iceberg. Syjuco have many corruption charges before the Ombudsman. I have filed four cases against him, and the only problem is that the Ombudsman seems to have slept on these cases.

At one time, he is accused of engineering a "ghost purchase" of 1,562 mobile phones using Ps.2 million of the funds of the Department of Transportation and Communications. In another, he was charged of rigging a public bidding in the Department of Public Works and Highways in a shorter advance by road to be congressmen and got the agency to buy luxury road-building equipment from his own foundation as an overprice.

If the President is serious about eradicating corruption, then she should drop the axe on Syjuco and show the world that there are no sacred cows in her administration.

I also call upon the Ombudsman to act expeditiously in all these cases which have been mounting resistance for two presidents.

—ROSVEL V. BAYOLISA, presidential administrator, Province of Iloilo

Strength in unity

THIS IS MY REJOICE TO the news story titled "Media calling Roger John II." (Inquirer, 1/20/08)

Seven years have passed, enough time for us to make an amendment of history. There is no lesson weaker than history alone is as we know teachers from experience. History is the depository of great actions, the actions of what is gone, therefore, origin and narrative of the present, and motive to the future.—Miguel Covarrubias

If John II had not happened, how would the Philippines be now? What would be the state of our economy if former Presidents Joseph Estrada had finished his term? Who would be our president now? What would have happened to our country?

To set John II in one of the Filipinos' best accomplishments in history "Random with no peg-peg-comes," the Arroyo administration had been witnessing this. I think we would not be in this situation if we had weak in Erap's presidency.

Seven years ago, the world saw how strong we are when we are united. Let's bear in mind, we are powerful when we are together.

—KING DAVID LOCAME, kingdave_locame@yahoo.com

Charge of the 'Brigade on quality English'

THIS IS TO CHALLENGE THE call for quality English.

Who should spearhead the effort to get back Filipinos to a satisfactory level of English proficiency? Achieving English proficiency demands a determined series of actions. Whatever modes of delivery are chosen, through the business, an educator or one as one sorts to English or Filipino as medium of instruction, or whether or not to allow the bilingual policy of instruction, or whether or not to disregard or tap the native tongue as a medium of instruction, etc. developed by our moral writers, journalists, thinkers, orators, stage performers, broadcasters, political leaders and statesmen.

We should spearhead the promotion of English proficiency while the debate on educative measures goes on? What teaching and modelling strategies offer promise? How can "Project Quality English" be launched region-wide and nationwide successfully? Where are the "foreigners" monitoring of improved results in proficient reading and productive learning to date?

All these call for the charge of the Brigade on Quality English.

—JESUS S. GIL, Baybay City, Leyte

Across the NATION

Contractor wants ₱261M more for project tagged overpriced

By Jaime B. Balanoba
Inquirer Visayas

CEBU CITY—THE PRINCIPAL contractor of the Cebu International Convention Center (CICC) has gone to court to force the provincial government to pay ₱261 million more for the ₱703-million project that has been criticized as overpriced.

The provincial government, however, refused to pay, saying that the contractor was collecting the additional amount for work not covered by a contract.

In a civil complaint, WT Construction (WTC) asked the regional trial court to order the provincial government to pay ₱261 million, plus 12 percent interest per year, interest.

Plunder

The contractor, represented by its vice president Willy Te, also demanded ₱1 million in damages and attorney's fees ($1,600 for attorney's fees and litigation expenses.

Cris Bautista, who is also a contractor, has sued provincial officials for plunder for the alleged overprice of the CICC.

Lawyer Jerome John Garcia, younger brother of Gov Gwendolyn Garcia, said the provincial government's legal team had advised the government not to pay WTC.

Garcia said the legal team questioned the contractor being sought by the contractor. "Our local government unit can't disburse funds without a contract. Everything has to be documented," Garcia added in an email.

Probe

He said the provincial government would investigate who authorized the additional work and how the ₱261 million was computed.

Results of the investigation will be presented in court as part of the respondent's defense.

WTC said it was fortunate Garcia who asked the first to do the additional work in rush completion of the CICC in time for the 12th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) summit.

Construction of the CICC was started in February 2006 and completed in November of the same year.

Ruel Sepahowla, provincial consultant on infrastructure, said Te, in his demand letter dated Jan. 8, 2008, asked the government to pay the ₱261 million, plus interest, since the firm "could no longer bear the pain and difficulties it is experiencing due to non-payment."

In the demand letter, Te said the unpaid sound PHLL and, for electrical and plumbing works and ₱178.9 million for site development, structural, civil and architectural works.

ENDANGERED
A wildboar roams the Mahagni Conservation Park in Davao City one of a few that are left of the species that has become endangered due to continued hunting and their capture for scientific purposes. JONATHAN DE CASTRO/INQUIRER

Gov presence at Ecija board session irks critics, execs

LABABIYAN CITY—VICE Gov Edward Thomas Joson has accused Gov Aurelio Umali of heaping, with her wife, into the session hall of the provincial board of Nueva Ecija.

The incident happened while the board, with Joson presiding officer, was discussing the province's budget. R. Sadiwa reckoned the supposed gap between the vice governor, a member of the powerful Joson clan here, and Umali, whose wife, Cristina Umali, is the province's third district representative in Congress.

"We should not have jumped from topic to topic or raise others as were discussing the budget. The executive and legislative branches have different functions," Joson said in a recollection.

He said the President, who is the chief executive, will overcome undermined while Congress is deliberating on the budget.

Board Member Raoyard Agapito said in the same exhibition that what Umali did was contrary to protocol.

Some of the Joson's opponents, carrying placards, entered the session hall, too.

Governor Umali said he and his wife went to the session hall to "observe (what is) going on during the session."

"Everybody is free to go there and observe; I was not involving in there affairs. I said nothing there," Umali said.

But he criticized the board for finishing more than ₱500 million from the proposed FY 2008 budget.

He said the session was for acknowledges and the operations of some provincial offices.

"It appeared that they don't want me to function effectively. They are crippling me," Umali said.

He said he would veto the budget once it reaches his office.

"Let's see what happens next," he added. Anselmo Roque, Inquirer Central Luzon

Transco execs sing different tunes on power

IMUS, CITY—IS THERE A looming power crisis in Mindanao? Even power officials here differ on answer to query.

Last week, the chief of the National Transmission Corp. (Transco) in General Santos City warned that Mindanao would experience a power shortage by 2009.

Manuel Mamaty, Transco General Santos chief, told reporters that the power crisis could come if no new power plants are built in the next three years.

"If no additional capacity is made, the crucial period will be in 2010 to 2011 during which the reserve level is expected to fall to less than the minimum reserve level," Mamaty said.

But on Tuesday, Transco-Davao commercial-team officer Madhusrie Capulong told reporters that the power crisis was not likely to happen even without new power plants.

Capulong said Transco had taken contingency measures to ensure enough power in Mindanao.

Among these, she said, was the scheduled upgrade of the Mindanao Backbone 230-kilovolt Transmission Backbone Project, which costs P1 billion.

The project will be implemented by Korean firm Hyundai Engineering Co. Ltd. and Philippine Corp.

The Mindanao-Interconnection project also involves the construction of a new switch station in Maramag, Bukidnon and the expansion of the Butuan-on, Agusan del Sur and Dr. Tupelo-in, Misamis Occidental substations.

"The power shortage in Mindanao, which Transco had projected to happen in 2009" and onwards, has become unlikely," she said.

Capulong said Mindanao had a current generating capacity of 1,407 megawatts (MW) and 531 MW in reserve capacity. Jody Queen and Rinalene B. Sese, Inquirer Mindanao

Typhoid strikes 100 villagers

STA. MARIA, DAVAO DEL Sur—More than 100 residents of Barangay Kinabal here have been rushed to various hospitals since last week due to typhoid fever.

Loreto Mesano, a barangay health worker, said health workers confirmed the prevalence of the disease in Sitio Dumot from the results of laboratory tests made on residents who were brought to the Davao del Sur provincial hospital in Digos City and other hospitals.

"We thought they were just experiencing ordinary fever," Mesano said.

Residents of Sitio Mantapun, which has 18 households, said most of their children were suffering from typhoid fever.

Danilo Inguancio said all his six children were afflicted with the disease, manifested by high fever, bloody diarrhea and headaches.

FOUR of the six children of Lolita Mamangun in Sta. Maria, Davao del Sur, are receiving fluid as a result of typhoid fever. Officials have yet to determine what is causing the disease that has sent more than 100 residents to various hospitals. ALVIN MARIANO/INQUIRER MINDANAO

Two of them, he said, had started to turn bald due to high fever.

Rolando Pada, 48, said it was the second time that many residents had fallen ill. In October last year, many villagers also got typhoid fever.

Mayor Rudy Elmerod said it was the first time he had heard about the prevalence of the disease in the village.

Elmerod is a coastal village and most residents get their drinking water from shallow wells. Orlando B. Mora, Inquirer Mindanao

NEWSBRIEFS

Tighter security in courts

DAVAO CITY—The Supreme Court has ordered courts to implement tighter security following the recent attacks on judges.

Executive Judge Albert Lacson said that under the Supreme Court's order, visitors entering the courts would be strictly scrutinized.

Employees must wear IDs while law enforcers entering the courts must be in uniform. Police were asked to deploy two officers to courts during trials.

Orlando B. Mora, Inquirer Mindanao

3 towers die in Angeles fire

ANGELES CITY—Three teenage girls died in a fire that gutted their dormitory here on Sunday, police said.

Photographs by Chief Insp. Cesar Santiago identified the fatalities as Angie Pagpal, Arlene Tamayo and Jessalyn Balon, all 17.

Two of the victims were found near a flat bright in their beds while the third victim was found on the ground floor, Santiago said.

The fire started at 4:25 a.m. and was put out shortly before 5 a.m.

It was the fourth fire to hit the province this month. Fires also hit Lubao, Mabalacat and Sasmuan.

Rosario Ocampo, Inquirer Central Luzon

Slay suspect nabbed in Batangas

CALABARZON CITY—A suspect in the killing of the 70-year-old son of a prominent family in Batangas is under the custody of the Batangas police, a police official said.

Jerome Pastor, one found dead with several shot wounds near a bridge in Barangay Talumpang, Batangas City, on Thursday, today after his family reported that he was missing, said Batangas police chief Senior Supt. David Basilio.

In a phone interview, Basilio said "witnesses against the family that an investigation is ongoing."

Basilio, however, refused to identify the suspect but said two persons could be said to be witnesses.

"The victim could not have been robbery," he said, adding that Pastor may have been involved in a vehicle-driving gang members.

Nita Catherine Calleja, Inquirer Southern Luzon

2 nephews of ex-mayor robbed

CAMP VICENTE LIM, Laguna—Two nephews of former Tanauan City Mayor Alfredo Lorenzo and eight others are facing charges of illegal gambling and possession of illegal drugs after they were arrested in a raid in Barangay 6 Poblacion on Jan. 20.

Tanauan City police chief Lt. Col. Jorge Pamela said an undetermined amount of shabu was recovered in the neighborhood. The suspects were detained at the Tanauan City Police Office.

Nita Catherine Calleja, Inquirer Southern Luzon

Report: Hanjin committed 7 safety lapses

By Amberr Joaquin and Tonette Orejas
Inquirer Central Luzon

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT—A POST ACCIDENT investigation conducted by the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority confirmed "inadequate safeguards" in the Hanjin shipyard and said the company had committed seven safety lapses that led to Friday's gas explosion that killed two workers and injured five others.

The SBMA's Ecology Center, which oversees the operations of the freeport's occupational health and safety division, cited the seven safety lapses in its report to SBMA Chair Feliciano Salonga.

Salonga immediately ordered Hanjin Heavy Industries & Construction Co. Ltd. to correct the lapses.

"The word is immediate. I'm not giving them any leeway. They need to do it right away," Salonga said when asked if Hanjin had been given a deadline to comply.

Hanjin management said the firm is complying with "immediate" remedial measures set forth by the report (see below).

In a statement, Hanjin said it has outlined standard emergency response procedures for all its shipyards.

Citing the Ecology Center's investigation report, the SBMA said among the safety lapses were the lack of effective emergency response procedures and safety officers, especially in hazardous work places.

Hanjin also lacked proper inspection procedures to ensure the soundness of equipment and materials, the SBMA said, quoting the Ecology Center findings, according to Lt. Gerald Domingo, acting fire chief.

The report said the degree of harm in the events indicated "inadequate precautionary measures in handling hazardous materials and inadequate ... fire-extinguishing equipment."

Hanjin also lacked safety or warning signs in high-risk and hazardous workplaces, the report said. It had no daily "tool box," referring to meetings that help remind workers on the hazards of specific jobs.

The investigation also confirmed that only one more worker died at the time of the accident. The company, it said, did not hire a company doctor.

INQUIRER Southern Luzon

Farmers pin hope on new land bill

The measure seeks to distribute land for free and expand agrarian reform coverage to all agricultural lands in the country

ROMY CAENAD, 40, STILL TILLS A hectare of land he inherited in Hacienda Payat in Naungha town in Batangas. But he will lose his property and livelihood, along with 600 other farmers, when some 2,400 hectares of agricultural lands are converted into residential-commercial use.

They will be moved to a sloping terrain where they could no longer farm, Caenad said. His family will starve and "I don't know any job except farming," he said in Filipino.

Another farmer, Mandy Loreto, 43, received an emancipation patent and a certificate of land ownership award (Cloa) from the Department of Agrarian Reform in 1988 for two parcels of land in Sarmiento Lane, also in Naungha.

But his parents and Cleo were canceled in 1995 to give way to an 8,680-ha recreation zone.

The farmers were offered a disturbance compensation, but the majority of them refused, Loreto said. Thus, the project could not proceed to its second phase.

Protest march

Caenad and Loreto were among 600 farmers who joined a seven-day protest march from Naungha to Manila on Jan. 15-21. Although coming from different places, they recalled that they have been victims of "loopholes" in land-granting/land-ownership to farmers.

In the case of Hacienda Payat, a conversation zone was issued way back in 1975 for the 2,400 hectares of land, according to Gemma Esguerra, acting head of the operations division of the DAR provincial office. This was even before the DAR was established, she said.

Esguerra said the land was supposed to be converted into a commercial and residential area, but development plans had been delayed because of the farmers' protests.

"The decision to convert the land is already final and executory. We also don't have enough money to pursue [our case]," Cueo said in an interview during the march.

In 2004, the DAR office submitted to its central office in Quezon City an application to review the case of the farmers in Hacienda de Payat, Esguerra said. The central office merely informed the provincial farmers on land use conversion, she said.

She admits that the farmers are still tilling the land and harvesting.

UNFAIRS roads from Naungha, Batangas to Manila to seek the scrapping of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program to avoid the passage of House Bill No. 2009 or the Dominio Agrarian Reform Act of 2007.

The case between the farmers in Hacienda Luisa and the developers is still pending at the Supreme Court, Cynthia Lapid, the provincial agrarian reform officer, said.

In 1990, the DAR central office exempted some portions of the hacienda from coverage of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), leading to the cancellation of some Cloa and patents. The CARP law was enacted in 1988.

Lapid said the order from the central office cited that 2,800 hectares of the land had been classified as unsuited for agriculture even before the CARP was implemented.

Because the Supreme Court has yet to rule on the dispute, the Hacienda Luisa owners could not proceed with their development plans, she added.

The 8,658-ha property located about 80 kilometers south of Manila is presently owned by Manila Southcoast and Hi-Eisan Corp.

According to the farmers' group Tinaan-ka-ito, the Dolor family, former owner of 3,432 has of Hacienda Luisa, failed to settle its debts with the Development Bank of the Philippines, prompting the bank to hold a public bidding. Bellevue Properties Inc. and its co-investor, Manila Southcoast Development Corp., won in the bidding.

According to the farmers, about 1,700 hectares of Hacienda Luisa is devoted to the production of rice, corn, vegetables and sugarcane. Pineapple and root crops are planted in the sloping areas.

House Bill 2009

Both farmers of Hacienda Payat and Hacienda Luisa are pinning their hopes on House Bill No. 2009, or the proposed Genuine Agrarian Reform Act of 2007.

The measure seeks to distribute land for free and expand agrarian reform coverage to all agricultural lands in the country. It was filed by representatives of party-list groups Anakpawis, Bayan Muna and Gabriela Women's Party on Nov. 15, 2007.

Loreto said HB 2009 would be adopted to help stop "businessmen and landlords" from taking their land away.

The farmers have also formed the Nagkakaisang Lakas ng Mamamayan sa Hacienda Payat and the the Ugnayan ng mga Magsasaka Laban sa Bagong Feudal ng Kabuyaan sa Hacienda Luisa (Unsulpa-Ka).

To push for the approval of HB 2009 and underscore their disagreement with the government's plan to extend the CARP the farmers joined the march that started in Naungha. Other farmers and supporters from Southern Tagalog, Bicol and Manila joined.

On Sunday they arrived in the St. Andrew Church in Pandacan City and commemorated the 1986 "people power" revolution at the Ninoy Aquino Monument in Makati City. They later headed to Mendiola to commemorate the 1987 massacre of 13 farmers, most of them from Southern Tagalog, Mike Guilbert de Gallola

75-year-old woman joins walk for justice

AT AGE 75, A WOMAN SHOULD BE ENJOYing the remaining years of her life in the company of grandchildren.

But Crisanta Gubiso insisted on marching from her town in Calauan, Laguna, to Manila to right for her small piece of land.

On Jan. 17, Nanay Crisanta joined more than 500 members of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) in the long march dubbed "Lakbay Hustisya" on Jan. 17-22 to draw government and public attention to their land problem.

She and her two married children depended on a 300-square-meter farm for their daily subsistence. Their farm, however, is part of a 130-hectare property owned by Jose Miguel Cuneo (JMC).

Nanay Crisanta said she had been tilling this land since she was a teenager. To augment her earnings, she resisted services as "labi" (traditional healer) and receives medications.

The land, covered by OCT No. 1094 but listed in the SMC property, was identified as a beneficiary of the government's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). She was only too happy that she could finally own the small farm.

But in May 1998, a year after CARP was activated, SMC filed for exemption of the 100-hectare portion of the land. On June 25, 1995, then Secretary of Department of Agrarian Reform Ernesto Garilao granted the exemption.

Nanay Crisanta and the other farmers filed a petition to revoke the DAR order. The department, in turn, placed under CARP the 30-hectare land owned by SMC.

But SMC filed a motion for reconsideration, as well as a complaint of forcible entry, and appealed for mandatory injunction against the farmers.

The Municipal Trial Court of Calauan approved the petition and, on July 29, 2005, ordered Nanay Crisanta and her fellow farmers to vacate the land they were occupying.

But with the help of DAR, the farmers were able to hold on to their land, for the meantime at least, in June 2006.

SMC filed an appeal to the Office of the President, which decided to cancel the DAR order to cover the SMC property under agrarian reform.

Despite all these, Nanay Crisanta was optimistic. "Even if it's hard and tiring, I will still march. I never lost hope," Nanay Crisanta said. Aya V. Arellaniz, contributor

HANDY Crisanta Gubiso joins the 6-day 75-kilometer march from Laguna to Manila to fight for her 130-square-meter farm.

Marinduque holds Sto. Niño feast

MARINDUQUE'S OWN VERSION OF THE feast of the Sto. Niño is fast becoming a tourist attraction in the capital town of Sta. Cruz.

Despite the rain, hundreds of children joined the Sto. Niño fluvial-themed parade as the town plaza on Sunday, which drew thousands of spectators, including tourists, and dignitaries to town.

Unlike the "Sinulog" of Cebu City, "Ati-atihan" in Iloilo City and the "Sto. Aklaan" in Kalibo town in Aklan, the annual fiesta city in Marinduque showcases a celebration of the children's devotion and early devotion to the Child Jesus.

Fifteen groups of 25-30 children each, aged 6 to 12 years, participated in the streets dancing competition, organizers said. They represented 15 barangays of the town.

Accompanied by their parents and guardians, the children—painted with black or colored paints or charcoal on their faces and body, and dressed in colorful tribal costumes—swayed and danced to the beat of drums. They shouted "Hala Bira!" while pranking around with make-believe spears and swords and images of the Sto. Niño.

Devotees also came with their Sto. Niño images clad in colorful and elegant costumes.

The traditional "Higantes," giant statues made of painted papier mache and wood, did not fail to join the spectacle.

The second was generally impressed with the giant figures of a cat (2008 is the year of the rat in Chinese astrology), a rabbit and a fan blade.

"This is Fun. The participants were great and the crowd was really animated," said Rafael Ortiz of Cainta City.

Ariel Madrigal, Provincial Treasurer, founder and adviser of the Sto. Niño Marinduque Art-Artisan Association, the festival has evolved into a festivity of devotion to that of children.

"We are hoping that more dreamers and children will participate in the future, and we are looking forward so that the town will be at par with the most established Sto. Niño festivals from other provinces so that more tourists will come to visit the province," said Hernandez. Gerald Gino R. Quevedo

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Barrios accepts key PBA position

By Marvyn B. Cuarillo

BARRIOS

BERNARD "BONNY" BARRIOS HAS DECLARED himself available yesterday to an indefinite term as commissioner of the Philippine Basketball Association.

The 39-year-old graduate of business studies at the Ateneo informed the league's board of his decision to accept the post of commissioner beyond the current Philippine Cup after making adjustments in his schedule.

Barrios, the former PBA executive director, then becomes the league's seventh commissioner, joining the ranks of such illustrious names such as Leo Prieto Jr., lawyer Rolando Infante and the late Hortensio Yrotta and Jun Bernardino.

The others who served before him were Sur Marquez for two years until 1984, and Nelly Dado, who resigned last August.

"I felt it was practically inconsiderate upon me to accept because I didn't want to leave the office hanging headless," said Barrios, who said that he would now "left" the reins of as chairman-commissioner to the board.

"My family has been very supportive, the board has been very supportive," Barrios said when asked how he planned to juggle his time between his PBA job and helping run his family's business interests in the United States.

On top of the things to be addressed by Barrios, aside from the rest of the tournament, is the television coverage with ABC-5's contract set to expire at the end of the year.

A board meeting scheduled for Monday will feature Butch Jimenez, a veteran television man, as a resource speaker who will talk about the finer points of the new concept the league will have.

The continued participation of the PBA in helping the national team will also be discussed.

Barrios, earlier named officer-in-charge, was promoted when the board failed to break a deadlock between lawyer Cleto Iñdal and businessman Lambert Ramos.

New commissioner, Inal join Inquirer read-along

NEW PBA COMMISSIONER Bernardo "Bonny" Ma-nao and his two Mannex Blue Eagles and now ex-FI Expresso ruper JC Intal are this week's celebrity readers in the Inquirer Read-Along program on Saturday, Jan. 26, from 10 a.m. to 12 noon.

Aside from Barrios and Intal, the program will also feature readers from Mitsubishi Storytellers Inc. and Gabbo Condominium Learning Program Inc.

Barrios and Intal will be joining the growing roster of celebrities who have graced the program. The list includes basketball star Oliver Ravena, US Ambassador to the Philippines Kristie Kenney, UP alumna rock band Imack Mirasol, Bandalang Pilipinas Gretchen Ho-na Theresa Loanne, teen stars Sam Concepcion and Christa Dimaiga and television personalities Marilyn Reyes, Thalia Bermoy-Galvez and Marivel Lava, among others.

Interested participants may call Ellen Capanas or Gaile Rellan at 8979808 local 529. Slots are available on a first come, first served basis.

Late Sports

More Sports stories on A23 to A26

Alaska takes Game 1

ALASKA'S Mike Cortes (middle) uses high-n an attempt to stop Coca-Cola's Aris Bienamalan from driving to the hoop. BOY CRUZ

Red Bull also prevails in series vs Magnolia

By Marvyn B. Cuarillo

ALASKA PUSHED THE WEARY TEAM HARD against the wall.

The Aces ran the feisty Coca-Cola Tigers to the ground without letup last night to take an 89-82 Game 1 victory in the Fiesta Conference PBA Philippine Cup's quarterfinals at the Cuneta Astrodome.

Alaska came back from an 11-point deficit in the first half and then pulled out all the stops in a wild endgame behind Willie Miller and reward Hapee Toothpaste's three-game Coca-Cola winning streak and move in position to sweep the best-of-

MORE THOUGHTS
Zaldy Ardinay
4 hit pro — fun but unexpected
Pedigrees
Tiff pro — thanks to time-line

three series.

"We know that if we pushed and challenged the title defenders, we would have to use (everything)," Alaska's Tim Cone said. "It was a rough game to get rid of. But we're going to come back and get in them again tomorrow."

Cone pointed out to what the Tigers had to go through to get this far, when they won two straight over Talk 'N Text and a second hundred game over Air21 to reach the wildcard phase.

"They (Tigers) kind of lost the heaviness in their steps," he said. "And it's clearly understandable what they went through. But they have been good in games with their backs to the wall."

Red Bull also took a 1-0 lead in its separate series with Magnolia Hotpet, getting a come-back rally 21 points from Dyan Castejon and seven digits from four others in a 102-100 victory.

Hapee scored 25 of its total in the third period and Mike Hrabak settled it for the game, including a clutch three in the fourth that also turned the Barako to within a win of the Final Four and is still alive with two stepladder playdowns.

The winners of the Alaska-Coca-Cola series will advance opposite Sta. Lucia.

Miller went on to lead the Aces with 23 points, eight of them coming in the most crucial times of the fourth quarter, including a three-pointer that slit the Tigers' collective throats with 1:31 to go which gave the Aces an 88-83 lead.

Hapee, on the other hand, received second scores of his 17 in the fourth as he and Miller combined for all but five of the Aces' total output in the period.

Asi Taulava scored 22 points and had 10 rebounds before eventually succumbing to the winning mates.

The scores

First Game

ALASKA (89)—Miller 23, Fajardo 17, Yeo 11, Cortez 11, Cabagnot 10, Cruz 6, Cruz 5, Dela Cruz 1, Castillo 0, Ebarle 0, Lastimosa 0, Ebarle 0, Lastimosa 0, Ebarle 0, Lastimosa

Success

is a state of mind.
One not only has to be in that state.
One has to live there.

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DID YOU KNOW

TAKSILAN! Wines was named after Isla de Tandaya in Manila, where the rum distillery was established in the mid-1700 century.
The word "tandaya" came from the term "tandayag," which refers to love-lying land.
Carl L. Bonabesa, Inquirer Research

A DAY AT THE BAY Taking advantage of the cool weather, a woman and her children take a dip in Manila Bay. Floating vendors in their makeshift boat/houses

CHR prober nabbed near Mendiola released

By Allison W. Lopez

THE MANILA CITY PROSECUTOR'S Office yesterday ordered the release of a Commission on Human Rights special investigator who was picked up by the police after he was found carrying a firearm in second-generation rally held near the Mendiola Bridge on Chino Roces Bridge on Tuesday.

Inspector Ibrahim Antonio Chief Klaire Grecian said Policarpio Inalangan Jr., 40, of Soldier's Village, Sta. Lucia, Pasig City, was "released for further investigation" after he was cautioned in the area for allegedly violating a provision of Batasang Pambansa 880 Sec. 11, paragraph G (1) and (2) of RP 6965 prohibits the carrying of deadly weapons within a radius of 100 meters from the area of public assembly.

Inalangan was spotted by police near the area where farmers and militants had gathered to mark the 1987 "Mendiola Massacre." He had a suspicious bulge in his waistline which later turned out to be a CZ 75B9mm pistol.

The CHR special investigator, however, said he was just picking up his daughter from a scout-by university.

Gerero said the order did not mean Inalangan would not be charged. "He would be given the opportunity to provide a counter-affidavit," she said.

'I was just defending myself'–Leviste

Ex-gov tells version of aide's killing for 1st time more than 1 year after incident

By DJ Yap

IN A DRAMATIC TESTIMONY PUNCTUATED BY A sudden outburst of tears, former Batangas Gov. Jose Antonio Leviste revealed for the first time his version of what happened between him and his longtime aide, Rafael de las Alas, on Jan. 12, 2007.

At yesterday's hearing of the 2nd case, Leviste admitted to shooting De las Alas dead in his office at the LPL Tower in Lopez Village, Makati City, after an argument over money and work matters.

He insisted, however, that he had done so in self-defense.

"Instinctively I was just defending myself. If I hadn't done that, I wouldn't be alive today," he said upon questioning by one of his lawyers, Carlos Deals Villaroel.

With the death of Manuel Gregorio last Jan. 31, Ramon Ga-

guerra took over as Leviste's lead counsel, although he yielded the task of conducting the former governor's direct examination to Villaroel.

For the first several minutes, Leviste maintained a calm demeanor during his direct examination before Judge Elmo Alameda of the Makati Regional Trial Court Branch 150.

But when he started to talk about how he shot De las Alas, Leviste suddenly became emotional, his voice broke and he started shedding tears as he recalled what happened. "I was bewildered. I was shocked. I didn't know what just happened. I became weak and my knees wobbled," he said of the moments after the shooting.

Later, outside the courtroom, he said in reply to a question about how he felt: "It's a great relief but it's not a cause for jubilation."

Testimony

Based on his testimony, Leviste said that De las Alas, who served as his executive assistant, had confronted him about the organizational restructuring of Jalas Inc., a real estate company owned by the former governor.

He said De las Alas was complaining about Leviste's plan to outsource a specific role in managing the company employees and responded that the responsibility fell on him.

But that was not what triggered the fatal shooting.

At one point during the heated exchange, Leviste said De las Alas demanded P1 million in cash—representing the financial support Leviste had promised him before dawn into P50,000 per month and incorporated into his salary.

According to Leviste, the amount was purportedly intended to support one of De las Alas' alleged mistresses, who was also working for the company. Leviste said De las Alas, who was aware of the financial crisis of the company, knew fully well he did not have that much cash at hand.

He recalled asking De las Alas: "Pare, ano ba ng nangyari sa 'yo? (What has gotten into you?"

To which De las Alas' replied: "Matalakas na ako. (I'm going crazy)," Leviste told the court.

At this point, the defendant said the victim suddenly pulled out his 9-mm caliber Smith and Wesson pistol and seemed about to shoot him.

"I pushed a gun, a Walter PB2 from my drawer and shot him. Then I saw him raise his left arm. Kinuha niya, with the gun still on his hand, so I got up, stepped out of range and fired succession[ally]," Leviste said.

By this time, Leviste was sobbing heavily, prompting Villaroel to ask him if he was okay.

Confused

"I don't know why this happened or how this happened. I'm still confused. I resisted him as a prisoner, I built him up," he said of De las Alas.

He said the fatal blood taken to call on his family thereon after, he cited the case of his acquaintance daughter Toni, who had to drop out of twelve

grade because of depression.

During a break, a staff member went to the side of the 66-year-old Leviste and took his blood pressure. She said the reading was 140/100. She thought the double reading of 100 was a bit high.

Leviste, who said had at the time, the victim, who he said he'd scuffled in him about his "health, financial and personal problems," had appeared to be more silent compared then usual.

He recalled that minutes before the shooting he heard De las Alas say in Filipino: "I'm have because of the gun I carry by my side."

Leviste also recounted that at one point in their tense exchanges, he had asked De las Alas how they could find a solution to their dispute.

He said De las Alas replied in Filipino: "The only way is salve

TURN TO A20

'Bank employee could have connived with robbers in failed heist'

By Marlen Ramos

INVESTIGATORS OF THE QUEZON City Police District are looking into the possibility that an employee of the Land Bank of the Philippines branch on West Avenue, Quezon City, connived with the group of armed men who tried to rob the establishment the other day.

Supt. Marcelino Pedroso, deputy chief of the QCPD Criminal Investigation and Detection Unit, said yesterday that they have invited bank employees and employees for questioning regarding the incident.

According to him, they believe the robbers knew a big amount of money was about to be delivered to the bank.

Pedroso, who was tasked by QCPD chief, Senior Supt. Magtanggol Gatdula, to head the investigation of the incident, said this would probably explain why the gang used more than 20 armed members to their operation.

He explained that it was rather unusual for bank robbers to carry out their plan in a large group.

"Apparently, they (robbers) never expect all that millions of pesos would be brought to the bank on that day as they moved more than. Who would know that kind of information?" the police official told the Inquirer.

Pedroso added that they also ordered the surrender of the armored van which delivered the money to the LBP branch a few minutes before the robbers removed the bank.

The robbers, on board three vehicles, barged into the government bank just before noon Tuesday.

The group, however, immediately left after they realized that the money that was just delivered to the bank had already been placed inside the multi-billionaire's security vault.

They eventually settled for the belongings and valuables of bank workers and clients.

Before the armed group fled, they shot and wounded three guards (see box on earlier report).

Meanwhile, Pedroso said they have identified Antonio Vivar Jr. as one of the armed men who took the money from a cash drawer, through his driver's license found inside a van abandoned by the robbers.

Container van loaded with milk products hijacked

by Tina G. Santos

POLICEMEN ARE LOOKING FOR three men who allegedly took off with a container van containing millions of pesos worth of milk products in Manila early yesterday morning.

Epifanio Baong, 56, driver of the 20-footer container van, said he and his four helpers were passing Pilaco Drive in Pasig, Manila, when three men motioned a truck blocked their path.

Baong told the police that one of the men boarded his container van and ordered him to continue driving. The truck manned by the suspect's companions followed them, he added.

When they reached Aurora Avenue in Quezon City, Baong said the hijackers blindfolded him and his companions, then reconnected the trailer to their own truck before speeding away.

Baong's four helpers were identified as Rodely Solbo, Harry Libunao, Allan Labatos and Don Serrano.

Baong told investigators that they came from Laguna and were on their way to Navotas City to deliver the container van containing Nestle milk products when the incident happened.

Police said they were looking into the possibility of an inside job because of inconsistencies in the statements of Baong and his helpers.

Businesswoman robbed, killed in Manila condo

By Tina G. Santos

A NUMBERLESS BUSINESSwoman was robbed and killed by an unidentified assailant yesterday morning inside her condominium unit in Manila.

Investigators of the Manila Police District said that Rodney Tanongson found his mother, Dorotea, sprawled inside her bedroom at the Casa de Bella Condominium on Concepcion Aguila Street, San Miguel, near Gen. 1 of Malacañang Palace at around 9:30 a.m.

The victim's body bore several stab wounds in the neck, police said. Relatives rushed her to the hospital for treatment but she was declared dead on arrival.

Tanongson's son told the police that more than P1.5 million in cash belonging to his mother was missing.

Before he discovered his mother's body, Rodney said he noticed that the door to her bedroom was half open so he went in. Inside, he found her sprawled on the floor and the room in total disarray.

The victim probably tried to fight off her attacker, the police said, noting the drop cuts the victim suffered in her right hand.

A 12-inch knife which the police believe was the murder weapon was found on the scene.

Tanongson's helper, Rony Abalon of Barangay Manrique, Bulacan del Sur, told the police that the victim asked him to buy cards at the Puregold Jr. Market in Cubao, Quezon City at around 7 a.m. When he returned at around 10 a.m., he was told the victim was already in the hospital.

Abalon has been the Tanongson household for the past 12 years, the police said.

The victim owned several businesses here and abroad, including a garments factory and condominium units, among others, the police added.

ALL RICE
A poor family eats their lunch, consisting of a ton of rice and some fried sardines, underneath a bridge in Manila. REUTERS

Farmers and fisherfolk, the forgotten sector

ON TARGET
Ramon Tulfo

INVESTMENT AND NATURAL Resources Secretary Joselito Atienza has ordered the incorporation of a community environment and resources officer (Cenro) in Baras del Norte for being implicated in illegal logging.

The illegal logging activities of the Cenro, and that of the mayor in a nearby town of the province, was exposed in this column Tuesday.

Atienza told this columnist he would not only have the Cenro official relieved, but also send him to prison if the report turns out to be true.

"Let's have him jailed for destroying the forest when he's supposed to be protecting it," said Atienza.

* * *

I have received reports that the Cenro employed a gunfighter to silence a provincial journalist who had exposed the illegal logging activities in the mountain town.

However the Army commander in the province learned about the assassination plot and warned the Cenro and the mayor to lay off the journalist.

But in the focus to protect the journalist, the protection of the forest in the mountain town has been forgotten.

The Cenro and the mayor continue to destroy the Baras forest in the upland town.

I am told that the Cenro is untouchable because he enjoys **the protection of a former Cabinet member** who's still close to Malacañang.

Let's see if Atienza can walk his talk.

* * *

The government worries about the effects of the depreciation of the dollar on the families of overseas workers, which is a proper and just worry. OFWs bring in much-needed dollars.

But the government forgets our farmers and fishermen who compose 70 percent of the population.

The great domestic product grows on account of consumer spending.

Since they comprise the majority of the population, farmers and fishermen are the biggest consumers.

But what do they spend when most of them can hardly earn for themselves?

The government spends so much on farm-to-market roads, but where are the roads?

President Gloria was supposed to help farmers produce more by giving them fertilizers, but the money to buy fertilizers was allegedly spent to have her elected in 2004.

Deposed President Erap, who said he was for empowering farmers and fishermen, allowed his Chinoy cronies to import frozen chicken and meat and vegetables to the detriment of local farmers.

Because imported chicken, meat and vegetables are sold cheaper than local ones, our farmers are losing out to smugglers and importers.

In short, we protect smugglers and importers more than we protect our farmers.

The result: There is more emigration from the farms to the cities, particularly Metro Manila.

Farmers come the informal settlers and the poor in towns. Manila? From the ranks of farmers and fisherfolk.

We talk of empowering the farmers and fisherfolk.

But what do we do to empower them?

Most of our rural banks have become commercial banks. Farm financing is no more.

Most local government units return our beautiful streams clearing forests so it is proper them to become improperly.

In advanced countries, they crown the daughter of a farmer who produces more from his cows, chicken, corn, peanuts, etc. Government documents the "secrets" of the success of a farmer so others will follow and produce more.

They are so efficient in food production, that's why food is cheap.

METROBRIEFS

Suspected explosives manufacturer robbed

THE MALABON, Bureau of Investigation yesterday arrested a man being arrested by the police on suspicion that he could be involved in the illegal manufacture and sale of explosives in Navotas City. Lawyer Oscar Lindain, chief of the NBI Anti-Organized Crime Division, claimed that Antonio Diaga, 53, of Antonio Gin, Pascual Street in Malabon, was a big arms supplier here of explosives used for blast fishing in the city. Agents of the bureau arrested Diaga while he was buying gunpowder, one of the ingredients in making the explosives, in Barangay Tejero-Mirasol, Navotas. Diaga now faces charges of violating Republic Act 9516 or the Philippine Code of the Philippines.

Tina G. Santos

Woman dies in mishap

A WOMAN was killed while her companion was seriously injured when the motorcycle they were riding was overtaken by a dump truck on Araneta Avenue, Quezon City, last before noon yesterday. A report from the Quezon City Traffic Enforcement Unit said Rosemarie Ho died as she was rushed to a nearby hospital. Her companion, Samuel Magallanes, is in critical condition in a hospital. The report said the pair was about to cross the street on board the motorcycle (SL 8321) driven by Magallanes when the rear portion was hit by the truck. It said the collision caused the motorcycle to fall on its side, while the victims were pinned under the truck.

Marlon Ramos

Car thieves strike

THE MANDALUYONG City police yesterday said unidentified motorists broke into two cars parked on Shaw Boulevard on Tuesday night. Businessman Dennis Layugan, 39, told police that Pontia Bautista, parked his car, a Nissan Sentra Extreme with plate number NPK 864, outside his condominium building in Barangay Highway Hills, Mandaluyong City at around 9:20 p.m. When they came out an hour later, they discovered that the vehicle's right rear window was broken and that his black backpack was missing. Layugan told the police that he had a computer laptop worth P114,000, two Apple iPod movie players worth P25,000, $10,000 and P50,000 in cash. The other victim, Raymond Ramos, lost a backpack containing school supplies when thieves broke the window of his car.

Kristine L. Alave

From page A-10

'I was just defending myself'—Leviste

this is when one of us is a corpse."

Senior State Prosecutor Ma. Imarah Milanes, who serves as counsel Leviste, told reporters he believed the former governor's testimony would not hold water.

He said Leviste's camp could not satisfy the requirements of self-defense since he waited more than a year to speak up, and did not even give a statement to the police.

He also said he was not convinced by Leviste's account, adding that the defense could not explain why De las Alas was still holding his gun in the chair if it was true he had pulled it out.

Milanes also reiterated his question as to why De las Alas' gun was an airgun back. He said he had reason to believe the entire scene had been tampered with.

Inquirers did not ask questions on redirect. He said there was no need to since Milanes had failed to discredit Leviste's testimony.

Diana de las Alas, the victim's daughter, said she did not feel Leviste's sincerity.

After his testimony, Leviste approached Ebarle and told her that he hoped they could put the past behind them. He did not apologize, reasoning that he had "done nothing wrong."

"He touched my hands," Ebarle said while Leviste told the media that Diana "was civil" to him during their encounter.

10-year-old girl with kidney disorder needs help

By Santiago B. Alcantara

JEMIMAH CRISTINO WAS ONLY 9 years old when clinicians told her parents that she had the symptoms of nephrotic syndrome.

The disease is characterized by a kidney disorder wherein large amounts of protein are excreted from the body, causing the patient to suffer from respiratory tract infection and edematic (puguse manas).

Jemimah suffered her worst attack last year when her body became bloated, with her waist line swelling from 23 to 38 inches, according to her mother, Dilaica.

CRISTINO

Now 10 years old, the girl is a Grade 3 mentally challenged student of the Point Science Elementary School in Tagaytay City. Despite her illness, Jemimah is actively involved in church and community activities, Dilaica said.

Last month, Jemimah underwent renal biopsy at the National Kidney and Transplant Institute on East Avenue, Quezon City.

The results were released on Jan. 6 but Dilaica said that they were only able to go back to the hospital last Jan. 22 because of monetary problems.

"The findings revealed that she has minor glomerular abnormality, and she needs to undergo electron microscopy. The doctors themselves cannot tell exactly what her illness is," said Dilaica, a single parent.

She added that during a recent consultation, the doctors told her her daughter would need medication until she turns 18.

"I'm appealing to kind-hearted readers for the help in buying Jemimah's maintenance medicine. I cannot do this alone," Dilaica said.

Those who want to help Jemimah can deposit their donations in Dilaica's bank account at Banco de Oro Universal under 2270013602[illegible], or they may call her at 0916-499-0882.

Threat from bird flu virus still real, say scientists

BANGKOK... THE WORLD CANnot afford to be complacent about the (H5N1 bird flu virus) despite no failure to trigger a human pandemic four years after sweeping across most of Asia, experts and officials said on Wednesday.

The latest outbreaks in India underscored the need for constant vigilance against a virus considered to lurk in parts of Asia, Africa and the Middle East, they told a bird flu conference in Bangkok.

"We can't afford to be complacent and say 'Look, it hasn't happened yet among humans'," Sanguich Tuchsuwong, Thailand's Minister of Science and Technology, told scientists from 48 countries attending the three-day conference.

"It's not a problem that can be solved overnight," he said.

The virus has killed millions of chickens and ducks and despite the slaughter of millions more and vaccination campaigns, the disease remains endemic in many poultry populations.

People become infected only rarely, but the fatality rate is still high. Of the 333 human cases recorded since 2003, a total of 219 have died, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Although (H5N) has not yet evolved into a virus that can pass easily between humans, it could still do so, said Robert Webster, of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis.

"It is a dangerous virus and one that we cannot afford to treat. It still has the potential to evolve and become a situation like we have now in Indonesia," he told the conference.

Others argue the jury is still out on whether (H5N) will trigger a global flu outbreak that could kill millions of people.

"I'm not convinced (H5 really has the ability to jump into humans and cause the next pandemic," Peter Palese, a professor at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, told Reuters.

"Most of the human cases are the result of a large dose infection," he said, such as victims who come into close contact with sick birds.

"If you are a chicken it's a serious problem, but I'm not so sure it's the next pandemic strain," he said. Reuters

TENS OF THOUSANDS of Palestinians make their way into Egypt after Palestinian gunmen blew up a section of the border wall between the Gaza Strip and Egypt on Jan. 23. The Palestinians poured into Egypt to stock up on food and barrier closer supply due to an Israeli blockade. REUTERS

Thaksin will return in May to face graft charges, says wife

THAKSIN

BANGKOK... EXILED PREMIER THAKSIN Shinawatra will return to Thailand in May to defend himself against corruption charges, his wife said on Wednesday as she pleaded not guilty to a graft case.

Pojaman Shinawatra did not speak during the 15-minute hearing at the Supreme Court, and smiled at reporters as she left the building.

But she pleaded not guilty to a series of charges, which will now be tried by the judges in court. Her statement said Thaksin, who has also been charged over the same case, would not land dead, would return in May to defend himself.

Thaksin has been living in self-imposed exile in Dubai since the military toppled his government in September 2006.

But his allies in the People Power Party (PPP) staged a comeback last month at the ballot box, winning the first elections since the bloodless coup.

The PPP has formed a six-party coalition that controls two thirds of the seats in parliament, and party leader Samak Sundaravej is expected to be nominated as prime minister on Friday.

Their victory has opened the door for Thaksin to return to Thailand, but analysts say that he will first have to find a way to settle a slate of corruption charges already filed against him.

The former telecoms tycoon indicated after the December elections that he would try to return by April.

Pojaman and Thaksin each have up to 13 years in prison over two graft charges alleging she used her husband's political influence to buy prime Bangkok property from a government agency at about one third of its estimated value.

"The purchase of the land was legal. It's anything was done according to the law," her lawyer Noppadol Pattama told reporters after the hearing.

The next hearing was set for April 21, when Pojaman will be asked to submit evidence and a list of witnesses in her defense.

The 51-year-old spent more than six months in exile with her husband while investigators have piled charges against them, but she returned to the kingdom earlier this month.

Pojaman and Thaksin also face separate criminal charges accusing them of fraudulent filings to the Assembly and Exchange Commission over the 2003 listing of a property company.

Pojaman, her step-brother Jaiyant Damapong and her personal secretary Kanchanpan Dongchoy also face additional criminal charges of tax evasion. They have pleaded not guilty in the case. AFP

Palestinians flood into Egypt

RAFAH, GAZA... PALESTINIAN gunmen blew up a section of the border wall between the Gaza Strip and Egypt on Wednesday, allowing tens of thousands of Palestinians to cross freely into Egypt, witnesses said.

Residents of the southern Gaza town of Rafah said a series of explosions overnight demolished about 200 metres of the border wall.

Egyptian riot police were to minimize the border mainly stood aside and let the Palestinians through, witnesses said.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians streamed into Egyptian territory, some on donkey carts and carrying luggage to bring consumer goods and fuel back into the coastal territory.

Israel closed its borders with the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip last week, cutting fuel supplies to the territory's main power plant and petrol stations and stopping aid shipments that include food and other humanitarian supplies.

Israel said the blockade was a bid to make Palestinian militants stop firing rockets into southern Israel. About 250 rockets and mortars were fired at Israel since last week, the Israeli Army said.

The European Union and international agencies have called the Israeli measures collective punishment on Gaza's 1.5 million residents.

Israel said the conditions in Gaza never reached crisis level and accused Hamas of exaggerating the impact of closure.

The Jewish state resumed fuel supplies to Gaza on Tuesday, restoring electricity to much of the territory that had been plunged in to darkness by the blockade.

Gaza has been largely run off since the Hamas militants routed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah forces to takeover the territory in June.

Shaaleem said members of Hamas and the Popular Resistance Committees were among the gunmen who blew up the border wall.

Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri denied that Hamas was involved, but said: "It was impossible to prevent the bursting of the border" which reflected the huge pressures on Palestinians under closure in Gaza. Reuters

Obama leads Clinton in South Carolina, says poll

COLUMBIA, S.C.—SENATOR Barack Obama holds a double-digit lead on rival Hillary Clinton three days before South Carolina's presidential primary, aided by a huge edge among black voters, according to a Reuters/C-SPAN/Zogby poll released on Wednesday.

Obama leads Clinton 41 percent to 23 percent in the rolling tracking poll, with John Edwards a distant third at 15 percent heading into Saturday's contest. The poll has a margin of error of 3.4 percentage points.

More than half of the Democratic primary voters in South Carolina are expected to be black. Obama, an Illinois senator who would be the first black US president, leads among African-Americans by 65 percent to 16 percent.

Clinton and Edwards are virtually tied among white voters, with Clinton leading 33 percent to 32 percent, while Obama is tilted among voters in 18-person Edwards' home county up slightly more than half of the poll sample.

"Obama is doing very well among African-Americans but getting a decent share of the white vote in a three-way race," pollster John Zogby said.

Obama and Clinton, a New York senator who would be the first woman US president, have engaged in an increasingly contentious duel for the Democratic nomination in November's election to succeed President George W. Bush.

The majority of the polling in the three-day survey was done before Monday night's angry debate in Myrtle Beach, where Obama and Clinton traded barbs and accusations about their records and Edwards chastised the pair for their squabbling.

In the one night of polling conducted after the debate, Edwards, a former North Carolina senator who won the South Carolina primary during his failed presidential bid in 2004, appeared to have made some slight gains, Zogby said. Reuters

OBAMA

dti

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(Sgd.) RUDY B. CARA
Director
Project Evaluation and Registration Department

US governors endorse Clinton

COLUMBIA, OHIO... TWENTY-three of the country's 50 governors have already endorsed a presidential candidate at a time when their support matters most, heading their names, fundraising and organizing efforts to win nominations for caucuses for an edge in the primaries.

Among Democrats, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton leads with nine endorsements, including nods from New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer and Gov. Ted Strickland of Ohio, the state chair of Democratic President George W. Bush's victory in 2004.

A governor's endorsement can be campaign gold since governors can effectively promise a candidate in their states and can share their own grass-roots organizing and fundraising networks.

Come the general election, it is natural for governors to support their party's nominee, and voters take it for granted. That makes governors' backing particularly important now, when candidates are vying to stake by-state primaries and conventions into a majority of delegates to their party's national presidential nominating conventions.

"Mayors in the primaries and governors are trying to make decisions among candidates that then potentially prefer, as those citizens tend to be

CLINTON

harder," said Neal Peirce, an Ohio State University political scientist. "There, a governor's endorsement can be powerful."

The endorsement game started early a year ago, seven governors already had announced their support for candidates, including Indiana's Mitch Daniels for Arizona Sen. John McCain, Missouri's Matt Blunt for former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney and Illinois' Rod Blagojevich for his home-state's senator, Barack Obama.

Despite the jockeying for endorsements, governors' backing has perhaps declined in importance over the years, said David Webber, a political scientist at the University of Missouri-Columbia. That's due in part to a weakening of state political organizations and in part to today's relentless media coverage.

"In our state governors have as much clout as they did 25 or 40 years ago," Webber said.

Obama has five endorsements, including those of governors of Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick, the nation's only black governor and a one-time top official at the Justice Department during the Clinton administration.

On the Republican side, McCain has four endorsements to Romney's three. Mike Huckabee, the former Arkansas governor, has support so far from only one governor, Mike Rounds of South Dakota. Gov. Rick Perry of Texas is the only governor to endorse former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani.

Some prominent endorsements are missing from governors whose states are among the 22 that hold primary or caucus contests on Feb. 5, when 1,678 of the 2,025 delegates needed to win the Democratic nomination and 1,018 of the 1,191 delegates need to win the Republican nomination are at stake.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger of California, the biggest prize on Feb. 5, has yet to back a candidate, though he has met personally with McCain, Giuliani and Romney and talked to Huckabee by phone. AP

Republic of the Philippines
PROVINCE OF LA UNION
San Fernando City

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The WORLD

Editor Lawrence B. Hosaka

'Brokeback Mountain' actor Ledger found dead

NEW YORK—ACTOR HEATH Ledger, 28, who reckoned to fame in his role as a gay cowboy in "Brokeback Mountain," was found dead in his New York residence on Tuesday, police said.

Police sources told US media that prescription pills were found in the apartment and said signs pointed to either an accidental overdose or suicide. His family in his native Australia described the death as "accidental." "We, Heath's family, can confirm the very tragic, untimely and accidental passing of our dearly loved son, brother and darling father of Matilda," said the actor's father Kim Ledger, reading a statement outside the family home in Perth. "He was found peacefully asleep in his New York apartment." He was a down-to-earth, generous, kind-hearted, life-loving, unselfish individual who was extremely inspirational to many."

Ledger was found dead at 3:26 p.m. on Tuesday in an apartment in the predominantly artists, a New York police spokesperson said. Neighbors said Ledger had been renting the loft apartment for the past several months.

An autopsy was scheduled for Wednesday.

New York City deputy police commissioner Paul Browne said a masseuse and a housekeeper discovered the actor's body after the masseuse arrived for an appointment.

They were "waiting for him to come out of the bedroom. When he didn't come out, they

LEDGER

climbed on him and found the body at the foot of the bed," Browne told reporters.

There were prescription medications that included sleeping pills that were taken from the apartment. The reports that they were removed around the body were untrue," said Browne.

The police department has made no determination as to the cause of death," he said, stressing that police were awaiting the medical examiner's report.

Expressions of sorrow poured in from Sydney to Hollywood.

Australia's Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said it was "tragic that we have lost one of our nation's finest actors in the prime of his life." "Heath Ledger's diverse and challenging roles will be remembered as some of the great performances by an Australian actor," he said in a statement.

"The reality is stunned and devastated by this tragic news," Warner Brothers chief Alan Horn and Pictures Entertainment Group president Jeff Robinov said in a statement. AFP

World powers reach pact on new sanctions vs Iran

BERLIN—WORLD POWERS REACHED AGREEment on Tuesday on a new UN Security Council resolution against Iran over its disputed nuclear program, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said.

"We agreed on the content of the new Security Council resolution," Steinmeier said after the meeting in Berlin of foreign ministers from the five permanent members of the Security Council—Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States—plus Germany.

Steinmeier said the resolution would be presented to the Security Council "in the coming weeks."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told Reuters journalists after the meeting that the new draft resolution envisages direct talks with Tehran that would include the United States.

"It's clearly confirmed by the conclusion that direct negotiations are underway, all questions related to the Iranian nuclear program—with the participation of all six powers, including the United States—would be initiated if Iran accepts the proposals of the six," Lavrov said.

In his remarks reported by the Itar-Tass news agency, the foreign minister added that the proposed text does not foresee fresh sanctions against Iran.

Lavrov said the new wording "was only acknowledges, but enforces progress made by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in clarifying aspects of Iran's nuclear program." Iran—which rejects Western fears that it is secretly developing nuclear weapons—has promised to answer unanswered questions put to it "within the next two or three weeks," Lavrov added.

A senior US official said the new resolution "increases the severity of the sanctions already in place and will also introduce new elements." He said the outcome of the meeting flew in the face of Iranian claims that the sanctions move had driven a wedge through the so-called P5+1 group.

"The US is very pleased because this is our interest in the Iranians—you are not out of the woods yet," the official said.

A German foreign ministry official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Berlin was "delighted" with the outcome of the talks.

The senior US official said the resolution foresees extending the travel ban on Iranian officials along with the asset freeze on companies linked to the Islamic republic's nuclear program. AFP

Suharto's health deteriorates; infection spreads

JAKARTA—THE HEALTH OF former Indonesian dictator Suharto deteriorated on Wednesday, with a potentially lethal infection spreading through his body, his doctors said.

Suharto, 86, who brutally ruled the nation for 32 years until being toppled a decade ago by a pro-democracy uprising, has developed digestive trouble and severe pneumonia, said Dr. Ardi Hidayat, a member of the presidential medical team.

"We are trying hard to find and detect the bacteria and treat him with proper antibiotics, but we cannot guarantee it will be successful," he told reporters. "We are not happy with his condition today."

Suharto, who was rushed to a hospital with anemia and a chronic kidney heart rate on Jan. 4, has suffered multiple organ failure and is on a ventilator, dialysis machine and is being fed through a tube.

A week after being admitted to the Pertamina Hospital in the capital, Jakarta, his heart briefly stopped and doctors said privately he was on the verge of death. Preparations began for a state funeral.

Last weekend doctors were optimistic, saying he was staging an "amazing recovery" had spoken, eaten and moved his hands.

But on Wednesday, his condition took a turn for the worse again and doctors said tests revealed sepsis—a "systemic infection" of the blood—and warned that Suharto's age and weak immune system were working against him.

Sepsis is particularly dangerous for the elderly and patients in critical condition.

Doctors also said fluid was accumulating in his lungs.

"His condition is worse this morning because fluid is accumulating in his lungs and the pneumonia has spread to both lungs," said another physician, Dr. Hadiati Mangkoesoepra.

Suharto led a regime widely regarded as one of the 20th century's most brutal and corrupt. In 32 years until he was toppled in May 1998 amid massive pro-democracy street protests, time there, he has lived a modest life in a comfortable villa in downtown Jakarta. AP

We're sharing that number one feeling!

They have been chosen

To all who joined Inquirer's "We're Sharing that No. 1 Feeling" event, thank you. We received an unprecedented outpouring of honest and heartwarming stories of their love affair with the Philippines' Number 1 newspaper on its 22nd Anniversary.

The Inquirer has finally chosen 22 with readers from all over the country as we may share that Number 1 feeling.

From the simplest wish to the most grand and unusual aspiration, the 22 were chosen by a panel of judges consisting of ten of the Inquirer's top editors and executives. The winners were picked due to their sincere and loyal Inquirer reading habit, the circumstances that surround their requests, and very unlikely wishes to grant.

The winning entries spanned a wide demographic across all corners of the country. All winners will be notified by mail and phone by official Inquirer representatives for details on claiming their prize.

Once again, thank you for giving more meaning to sharing our Number 1 Feeling.

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SPORTS

Editor Rodolfo S. Plehuelas Associate Editor Francis T. J. Dakay

■ Federer, Serbians march on /A26

Rich TCC Invitational gets going

Miñoza rules pro-am event

By Mesang R. Carallo

STA. ROSA, LAGUNA—DEFENDING champion Angelo Que knows the pressure is on him. He's why he's thankful that there are so many stars in The Country Club for the Second Rich Invitational.

"I know that a lot of people will be keeping their eyes on the others," said Que after his final practice yesterday for the P4.5 million event which starts today at the difficult par-70 layout here.

Foremost among the stars is veteran Frankie Miñoza, who further underscored his status as top favorite by winning the pro-am event on the eve of the tournament with Chesbro Garcia.

Miñoza, who pulled off the rare feat of winning both in the States and Japan Tours last season, combined with Garcia to score a net 61 while shooting a one-under 69 on his own. Frankie won P76,000.

MIÑOZA

Jay Bayron and Chucky Reyes finished second with a 63 over Peter Mumar and Fred de Mesa. Bayron picked up P68,000 and the younger Miñoza P60,500.

The 29-year-old Que, who won with a three-under 277 total last year, said Miñoza's pro-am victory certainly takes "some of the pressure" off him.

"It will then be up to me to play the best that I can and then hope for the best," Que said. "I really don't have control over the games of the others. It's me and the course."

Rising Asian Tour star Juvic Pagunsan, the 2006 winner, is also a top contender in the tournament supported by ICTSI, along with Fernando Manahan, who leaves very well the 7,200-yard layout, where he notched seven early as a newcomer.

Past champion Chesbro Garcia, newcomers Que and Rowenne Delarmente are also players to contend with, like former RP Open winner Arnold Rosales and the auburn Allen Pacay who's riding of tournament-best cuts.

Que, reigning regional titlist in the tournament, will be in the 8:20 a.m. group with the long-hitting Boy Peñaverde and amateur Jesse Bautista that will tee off on No. 1.

"It sure wants to rainwash any chance of winning, he has to have a strong start," said Que, who pronounced his game to be in the level where he wants it.

Batucal claims 2nd 'Para' gold

SAMOSIR, KAZOKSIRIA, THAILAND—Joel Batucal captured his second athletics gold medal yesterday to light up what almost turned out as another dud day for Team Philippines with two days to go in the 4th Association of Southeast Asian Nations Para Games at the sprawling Rit Mayom The Raja's 80th Anniversary Stadium here.

Late in the day, Batucal, who had a pair of other medals both in yesterday, pure RP in the swimming pool, the lone medal the 200m freestyle 69 class in two minutes and 31.80 seconds, outclassing Thai Sarnak Sirodon 12:30.138 and Vietnamese Nguyen Hoang Mai (2:40.23).

Antolin Magalon scissored 3607 points in pentathlon to give the country its third gold of the day.

Batucal, 27, seized the first par gold in 817 metres to shatter compatriot Jerico Quintal's record of 7.40m the latter registered in the 2005 Manila Para Games.

It was Batucal's second straight golden effort and both came in no-sel finishing freetime meets for also relegated Quintal's 25.53m discus throw made with a 21.31m.

"Nothing beats this feeling," said Batucal.

I'm better than Barrera, Morales, says Marquez

By Ray Lauren

WILLIE MARKY PACQUIAO, HERE IS A serious threat to Filipinos, Juan Manuel Marquez is hanging his reputation on likeness.

While he holds the World Boxing Council super featherweight crown, Marquez is not intimidated the name synonymous Mexicans held for compatriots Marco Antonio Barrera and Erik Morales.

This, despite the fact that he was able to salvage a draw with Pacquiao, who has conquered Barrera and Morales twice in a row.

Pushing that only victory over Pacquiao could elevate him to superstar status, Marquez agreed to make his world title against the Filipino ring icon on March 15.

Marquez also agreed to a huge pay cut that would give him a meager 30 percent share of the purse and revenues to be generated from ticket sales and HBO pay-per-view of the weighted bout slated at the Mandalay Bay and Centro in Las Vegas.

"I've always wanted to prove that I am better than Marco Antonio Barrera and Erik Morales," Marquez told David Aida of The Street Sensors. "I proved it against Barrera but I think Morales never wanted to fight me.

"The people likes me, followed Morales and Barrera because they had more experience. Juan just as the back of the line."

Born, at 34, Marquez wants to move in front of Pacquiao's empress.

"I've been trying to demonstrate who I am," said Marquez. "People will know me as Mexico when Don Manny Pacquiao."

Arcilla, Tierro humble Davis Cup rivals

By Marc Anthony Reyes

VETERAN JOHNNY ARCILLA AND Patrick John Tierro moved a step closer to winning the 66th edition of the Davis Cup team after humbling their respective rivals yesterday in the final tryout phase at the Rizal Memorial Tennis Center.

Arcilla, who holds the record for most doubles matches win in the Davis Cup at 54, defeated 19-year-old lawyer Pablo Oliveros II, 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (5), for his first win in the elimination round.

Tierro, 22, came back strong after a sluggish first set to turn back Kyle Joshua Sinchiu, 6-4, 6-4, 6-2, 6-3, in the other match.

TIERRO

Matches will resume Friday and Sunday to determine the final composition of the RP squad that will host Japan in the Asia Oceania Group I in on Feb. 8-10 at the RMTC.

The players with the most number of wins after the eliminations will join Cecil Mamiit and Treat Huey in the team which will be officially called Cebuana Lhuillier-RP Davis Cup Team in honor of its patron. Jose Lhuillier, who is also the team manager.

The fourth member of the team, according to Philippine Lawn Tennis Association vice president Randy Villanueva, will then be chosen by the coaching staff and will be known as the Captain's Pick.

Matches are a best-of-five sets with the tie quiet system to be used when sets were will be tabled against one played to nine games finished with similar records.

Philta said the two players who fail to make it will be named as alternates.

Mamiit and Tiano are expected to fly in by next week, according to officials.

Mamiit will be coming from a training camp in Hawaii, while Tiano has been campaigning in the United States.

The Philippine Davis Cup team is composed of Go Sonda, ranked 20-2 in the world, Jumbi Bulanadi, 19-year-old Yanbi Sagun and veteran Eduan Rosedi.

The Japanese failed to bulge into the World Group after getting drubbed by Pakistan (2-3) last year.

They will have a Filipino bench fresh from eight to nineties that started in 2000 when Mamiit and Tiano starred during the national colors.

A victory against Japan would keep the Philippines in Group I.

Phone Pals want to keep Pumaren

IT MAY IMPOSSIBLE but to speculate about major changes in the Talk 'N Text camp.

To start with, the highly vaunted Phone Pals were booed off the quarterfinals ironically by Coca-Cola, the team to which they had earlier dusted former Phone Pal Kid Tenorio.

Tenorio's sterling performance does he moved over to Coke was one of the reasons for TNT's early vacation.

Coming on the heels of the disqualification, the Phone Pals were called to a meeting by top management. The meeting was exclusive for players and sealed off to coaching staff and even some members of the media.

This further fueled speculations of a major shakeup.

* * *

Ironically, change was the last thing the players wanted, as PBA governor Rudy Thiegon and PLDT chair Manny V. Pangilinan found out during the dialogue.

The players said there had been too many inconsistencies already and this would be one of the vital factors that had hindered the team's progress.

They also offered other insights but got caught on one. They wanted no more change—not among their ranks or within the coaching staff.

In other words, they wanted Jaworski head coach Derrick Pumaren in any.

Pangilinan and Tenorio listened to the players' appeal, without giving a definite yea or no.

* * *

Frankly I was surprised by the unanimous stand of the players about coaching. This was confirmed to me by one of the Phone Pals, who said that the Fil-Am and homegrowns remained united and singular in their purpose.

"Kasi matatag naggabi ng coach. It's actually a long and tedious process of relationship because you have to internalize the new system, adapt to his personality," the player said.

* * *

Yesterday, I was told by a TNT insider that it wasn't only the players that unanimously had met with but the coaching staff as well.

"Even manager Frankie Lim and coach Derrick Pumaren and his staff had their turn to talk with Ricky and MVP," said my source.

So, will there be changes for the next conference, in terms of personnel?

"This is the only question I asked Ricky yesterday.

Ricky said he and MVP should be able to decide soon.

* * *

I had a chance to have a short chat with former RP president Jose Lina, who has been under the sports radar for quite some time, at the Manila Bowling Center in the president. Jose said he is living peacefully and is, in fact, already involved in the sporting business.

It's a small world, really because Jose said he was signing a contract that afternoon with Julius and was train Regie and Milne Romero, his partners in cricket training.

Needless to say, I had a chance to meet Alkaw's father—and that the afternoon.

* * *

Calling all fourth 'Ot graduates of Manuel A. Roxas High School in Sta. Mesa, Manila. Please register now with any of the following for the annual alumni homecoming scheduled on Jan. 27: Alma del Rosario Feliciano (0918-9179717), Cecilia Angel Cuchiay (0918-9506018), Major Manny de Guzman (0920-9327810), Bally Granados (0905-2901274), Mercy Montano (0920-3963881) and Tessie Rivera de la Rosa (0919-5781901).

OLYMPIC QUALIFIER

Warm welcome for RP pugs

By Rowah Trinidad

BAGUIO—TENSION MELTED AFter the Silay confirmed if Filipino boxers received a warm welcome and were ordered into a special entry reserved for diplomatic treatment.

Short of dropping his guard, the head coach of the 30-strong team said he lauded the Filipino fans and fighters from moving around here in their handsome national team jackets.

There was none of the feared hostility that was entertained in Manila following the near walkout staged by the RP boxing team during the 24th Southeast Asian Games/Boxing championship in Nakhon Ratchasima last December.

However, RP head coach Bo Ginpit said that, more than the Thais, he expects fighters from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Korea and Mongolia to provide trouble for the five-man national squad during the Asian Olympic Qualifying Tournament that officially fires off at the DPS gym on Friday.

"We had to compete against the whole world in the Chicago world championship, but even against Silay here, our fighters still have to do their very best," Ginpit told the Inquirer on the team bus yesterday.

At the same time, Ginpit, reigned by assessment as opening day is the technical meeting.

On Friday, there will be the morning medical and weigh-in followed by preliminary bouts in the afternoon.

Ginpit picked Rywaight Violeta (56 kg.) and Jonnavie-ngie Joan Tipon to join light fly Harry Tabanol, who qualified for the Beijing Olympics after winning the silver medal in the Chicago world tournament.

Gerebert Bandrie, Orlando Tarayan Jr. and Adam Rigonan Fiel complete RP's lineup.

Armature Boxing Association of the Philippines president Manny Lopez, who said he expects to qualify four fighters to Beijing, is expected here Thursday.

Only the winner and runner-up in each division here will qualify for the Olympics and Ginpit said a fighter will need a total of four wins in order to make it.

Thailand has already qualified five boxers to the Beijing Games so Ginpit said at least only two more Thais could stand to the way of the Philippines.

SPORTSWATCH

Urbiztondo tops Cebu chess

CEBU CITY (PI) MANAGERS BRYLLREZ-bredt/manuel/manuelmanuel Boy Ros of Gregorio City in the fifth and final round to merge overall champion in the recent Sibu Executives and Professionals Chess championships at Days Hotel in Cebu City. Cebu Playground, Urbiztondo, a former marketing of Cebu Institute of Technology, prevailed after 29 moves in a Sicilian Defense Maroczy variation to finish with 4.5 points on four wins and a draw. Mater Benavides, Contributor

Batch 93 reaches semifinals

BATCH 93 POSTED A COMFORTABLE 68-40 win over archrival Batch 95 to reach the semifinals of the Southern Baptist School Mario O. Camarine Cup basketball tournament. Doc Galicinao Raymond Lopez, Boy Tandoy and Danny Revista led Batch 93, whose members include ace playmaker Joel Cardona, Antonio Hilario, Samson Leonardo, Paul Bolante, Mark Taguro, Jeff Capulso, Danny Ruganio, Allan Sison, Alan Sison and Willy Molino. Matthew Tanseco is the team manager.

World Slasher starts Jan. 29

THE INDIA 8 IS AS WHEN CUP KICKOFF ON Jan. 29 at the Ayala Alabang Complex with Thailand Power Pedro and Manila management hoping to come up with the grandest staging of the event dubbed "the biggest weightlifting event in the world." The World Slasher invitational 8-Cock Derby will run until Feb. 2. Also known as "The Olympics of Cockfighting," the 16-nation event will bring together top sportsmen cockers from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Australia, Spain, Germany and Japan, challenging the country's top local gamefowl breeders. Foreign gamefowl invasions are expected to compete in the ultimate derby event include Chicago Hatcheries of Georgia (World Champion Derby 2004), Chet Alexander of Alabama, Mike Hammond of Hawaii, and Joe Blanford of California. For more details log on to www.worldslasher.com and www.tolentel.com.ph or call 8713888 and 8713187. Local 8087 and 8088.

LPC hosts 110 fights today

FEATHERWEIGHT COCKERS WHO BRISTLED from all over Luzon converge today at Las Piñas Coliseum as the much-awaited Jinkeng Fun & Games 8-cock derby unfolds with 110 fights lined up. The event will start promptly at 2 p.m., according to cockpit manager Alan Tomas. Mayor Boy Aguilar and his youngest daughter Budit Aguilar were headed this fund-raising affair to support several projects of Las Piñas City. The biggest Ad Odds 1-cock derby unfolds on Jan. 26. For details, 879 1640 and 8175455 (text/no jokes).

Pasig derby sets 88 matches

INTERCITY TAMA BASKETBALL MATCHES on tap, it's now all systems go for the 4TC 4-cock derby beginning at 8 a.m. today at Pasig Sports Center. PSG pit manager Abel Zamudio has invited cockers from Metro Manila to the event. Meanwhile, a total of 17 Filipino wins were registered in PSG's Mercedes Fadeaway/Bo One Cock Shoot, where the winners got two brand-new Honda motorcycles and cash prizes. Another Fadeaway One Cock Shoot unfolds on Jan. 26 with over 100 entries expected. For details, please call 6460810 and 6460809.

ROMAN Pacquiao (right) in his stuff during a qualifying tournament.

Fil-Am pug seeks Olympic slot

By Dennis U. Erasa
Inquirer Libre

IS HE FOR REAL?

The answer will be known when Filipino-American boxer Adam Rigonan Fiel gets a taste of world-class opposition as part of a crack five-man national team on the Pinoy Aiba Asian Olympic boxing qualifying tournament starting tomorrow up to Feb. 2 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Only 18, Fiel, a prized find from Pasadena, California, is competing in his first major tournament outside the United States.

"There's no turning back now. I want to bring honor to the Philippines," said the 6-foot-2 Fiel, whose parents hail from Cebu and Manila.

A light welterweight, Fiel along with flyweight Violeta Isola, featherweight Joan Tipon, lightweight Gerebert Bandrie and heavyweight Orlando Tarayan Jr. left yesterday with the 80-team-via Philippine airlines for Bangkok.

The team is headed by Amateur Boxing Association of the Philippines president Manny V. Lopez.

Coaches are Bo Ginpit and ex-Olympian Romeo Chavez. Fiel and Tarayan are newcomers while Isola and Bandrie fell a win short of reaching Beijing Olympic berths during the World Championships in Chicago, Illinois last November.

Tipon, who with Isola won gold medals in the 2006 Doha Asian Games, lost in the first round in the Windy City to Ukraine's Inna Romanova.

He is expected to cross paths again with the Thai bet, who also failed to advance in Chicago.

Fiel gained the nod of the coaching staff after knocking with members of the national pool for two months at Southern Comp. in Baguio City and at the Ateneo Gym inside the Rizal Memorial Coliseum.

"Adam is capable of springing a surprise in Bangkok," said Lopez.

Fiel, who trained longtime national team member Bobby Balcolar, who was a backstabbing the Manila.

Known for his big fighting heart, Fiel's drawback is his tendency punishing strike.

"He's've already worked double overtime to correct that flaw," said Ginpit. "We've installed in his mind the need to throw more punches."

To reach the Olympics, the 80 boxers need at least three wins to advance to the finals of their respective events.

The lone boxing qualifier so far is light flyweight Harry Tabanon who won a silver medal in Chicago.

"Our target is one or two slots," said Lopez.

Lopez said the country will also send a team to the second and final Asian Olympic qualifying in March in Astana, Kazakhstan.

RIVILA

Bill Shaw classic tees off

FOUR-TIME LOUIS VUITTON CUP CHAMPION SKIPPER BILL SHAW TEES OFF TODAY AT the Wack Wack Golf and Country Club in Mandaluyong City in the Bill Shaw Golf Classic.

A total of 264 two-man teams are vying for top honors and a chance at the two $1,000-plus Grand Classic titles in the C-Class and Senior Division.

Shaw, who is also the chairman of the Philippine Sailing Association, will be joined by Ramon Ang, president and chief operating officer of San Miguel Corporation, Ramon Ang, president and chief operating officer of San Miguel Corporation, Ramon Ang, president and chief operating officer of San Miguel Corporation,

RP Olympic hopefuls looking for 'godfathers'

By Joni Madamba

THE OLYMPIC TASK FORCE COMPOSED of high ranking Philippine Olympic Committee and Philippine Sports Commission officials yesterday gave the national sports associations with Olympic hopefuls two weeks to name their respective "godfathers" and submit a detailed budget for their training.

"We're giving them (NSAs) a free hand to look for a sponsor of their own preference," said Olympic chief of mission Monico Puentevella.

"If they can't find any, we will be obliged to look for one for them and they shouldn't blame us if something goes wrong," added the first vice president of the POC.

Except for boxing, taekwondo and wushu, the other NSAs seeking Olympic berths have yet to find a sponsor. POC chair William Ramirez said swimming might get a godfather soon but nothing as final yet.

The NSAs without sponsors are archery, shooting, diving, rowing, shooting, gymnastics, judo, tennis, beach volleyball, weightlifting and fencing, where athletes are seeking Olympic slots through several qualifying tournaments.

Telecommunications mogul Manny V. Pangilinan has committed to support boxing and taekwondo through ULTC Inner while the San Miguel Foundation has opted to help the wushu team in Beijing.

"So far only boxing has submitted a reasonable and detailed accounting of how much it would spend for the Olympic training," said Puentevella. "Other budget proposals, which I would rather not mention, were questioned and the NSAs were asked to reconsider them."

As soon as the NSAs submit their projected budget, Puentevella said the respective Olympic training program would immediately be implemented.

As the government arm in sports, the PSC has initially earmarked P50 million for the Olympic campaign.

HASH: Wilson Ino's foot, Ino's foot

Nash rallies Suns past Bucks; Kings triumph

MILWAUKEE—GUARD STEVE NASH helped the Phoenix Suns overthrow a nine-point, fourth-quarter deficit and post a 114-105 road victory over the Milwaukee Bucks on Tuesday.

The All-Star playmaker scored 35 of his season-high 37 points in the fourth period and added 13 assists in total as Phoenix became the first team in the Western Conference to reach 30 wins this season.

The Suns are 30-12, second only to the Boston Celtics (34-8) for the best record in the league.

Phoenix also continued their dominance of Milwaukee, winning 30 of the last 34 games against the Bucks since March 28, 1991. During that run, the Suns are 30-0 against the Bucks in Phoenix.

Amare Stoudemire had 19 points and 12 rebounds and Raja Bell also scored 19 points for the Suns, but the stage belonged to Nash.

"That's what he means to us," Bell told reporters. "If he doesn't get those upper entries (in score) you can give much lash on the list that he will find the guy who is wide-open.

"Everyone knows to play us like that. It's the reason he is probably not best shooter."

The Suns were also bolstered by the return of Grant Hill to the starting line-up, the guard coming back less than two weeks after undergoing an appendectomy on Jan. 9.

He had eight points in 27 minutes.

Michael Redd scored 26 points for the Bucks, but could only register two in the fourth quarter. Andrew Bogut had 19 points and 12 rebounds for the loss.

NBA GAMES TODAY
Basketball Tip-
8:30 a.m.—Toronto Raptors at Boston Celtics
1:00 p.m. (if if it is)
AND 8: 7:30 a.m.—LA Lakers at San Antonio Spurs

"They have a couple of All-Star type players that made some plays," Milwaukee coach Larry Krystkowiak said. "Steve Nash came up huge.

"It's a tough one to swallow. Our guys really played hard."

The Sacramento Kings benefited from having their three leading players in the starting line-up for the first time this season with a 128-94 thumping of the visiting New Jersey Nets.

Ron Artest scored 27 points, Kevin Martin 19 and Mike Bibby 15 as the Kings won their third straight game.

Vince Carter had 23 points and eight assists for the Nets. *Reuters*

Donaire gives 'Z' advice

FLYING PROSPECT J. GORRES must move a lot and get a lot if he wishes to beat Armenian knockout artist Vic Darchinyan when they clash on Feb. 2 at the Cebu Waterfront Hotel and Casino.

This advice comes from International Boxing Federation flyweight champion Nonito Donaire Jr., who owns the distinction of handing Darchinyan his only loss (KO round knockout) in 39 outings in their title duel last July.

"I just has to stick to his game plan," said Donaire. "He has to move and move since he's a lot quicker than Darchinyan, who really has a power punch. He needs to jab a lot and try to outbox Darchinyan."

Aside that loss, Darchinyan has managed to bounce back, sending a 12-round knockout of Filipino Federico Catalloyan to raise his ring record to 30-1, including 23 by knockouts.

Gorres, the pride of Mandaue, is coming off an eight-round technical knockout of Eric Ortiz.

Ikeda, Ivana renew rivalry in DHL amateur golf tilt

WHILE FOCUS WILL BE ON THE men's side of the DHL-NWFExpress National Amateur Golf Championships, the battle for the ladies crown is likewise expected to draw attention with Filipina-Japanese Chihiro Ikeda and Indonesian Lydia Ivana Jaya looming as top contenders.

Ikeda rallied from three shots down with a closing 73 as she pocketed an Ivana's final round meltdown to snatch the Philippine Ladies Open crown at Manila Southwoods last week. Ivana, who led in the first two rounds, stumbled with a 79 and lost by three.

Out to redeem herself, Ivana aimed to stay put and compete in the DHL NWFExpress Open, which unfolds Jan. 29 at the north course of the Canlubang golf complex in Laguna.

Among the hunt for the ladies crown is the 54-hole tournament are Southeast Asian Games silver medalist Anja Tompkins; also the runner-up to shootout Dottie Ardina last year, Regina De Guzman and Cyna Bridgman, who is on a break from a golf scholarship from UTM.

Mission Hills, the organizing National Golf Association of the Philippines (NGAP) said deadline for submission of entries will be tomorrow for details, contact NGAP at 5229497 and 5345360; Fax: 521-1557 and at Canlubang with telefax 049-5490362.

SPORTS

Federer, Serbians march on

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA—TOP-seeded Roger Federer overcame a gritty challenge from No. 12 James Blake 7-5, 7-6 (5), 6-4 Wednesday to reach the Australian Open semifinals.

The victory kept alive Federer's drive to win here for the third consecutive year and pull within one of Pete Sampras' record of 14 Grand Slam titles.

He next faces No. 3 Novak Djokovic.

Venus Williams followed her sister Serena out of the Australian Open to the quarterfinals in losses to Serbian players on back-to-back days.

Djokovic beat No. 5 David Ferrer, 6-1, 6-3, 7-5, on his fifth match point Wednesday, becoming the third Serbian player into the semifinals at Melbourne Park and rejoining the country's performance from the last French Open.

Venus Williams went down, 7-6 (3), 6-4, to No. 6-seeded Ana Ivanovic in the previous match, a day after defending champion Serena lost to No. 3 Jelena Jankovic.

Ivanovic, who had never taken a set off Williams in four previous contests, is into the semifinals for the third time at a Grand Slam and next faces first-timer Daniela Hantuchova, who beat 4g nineder Sudsomboon, 6-2, 6-2.

In the other women's semifinal Thursday Jankovic will meet No. 7 Maria Sharapova, who ended top-seeded Justine Henin's 32-match winning streak, 6-4, 6-0, on Tuesday.

After four straight losses to Williams, including the semifinals at Wimbledon and the fourth round at the US Open, Ivanovic was thrilled to win.

"It was an amazing match and I'm just thrilled to get through," Ivanovic said. "In the last 18 months I've come a long way."

Djokovic lost the US Open final to Federer, who is bidding for a third straight Australian title and 11th major—one shy of Pete Sampras' record 14.

A7 FAMOUS: Thrilled to get through »

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Stars crawl out from under rubble of war

MELBOURNE—FOR A COUNTRY IN this grip of war barely 10 years ago, it seems astonishing that Serbia has produced so many tennis players so all.

But with three of its players dazzling Australian open semifinalists, 2008 could be the year the Balkan nation claims the sport as its own.

Novak Djokovic, Ankea Jankovic and Ana Ivanovic have all reinforced their credentials as future champions; players who can crash tennis into the next era.

Jankovic beat defending champion Serena Williams to make the last four on Tuesday while Ivanovic cut her rival's more brutal packing Wednesday, rendering a shift in the pecking order of the women's game.

DJOKOVIC »»

Djokovic crushed fifth seed David Ferrer to reach the semifinals Wednesday while over-achieving 20-year-old Jankovic took unseeded world No. 1 Roger Federer to five sets before losing.

JANKOVIC »

Their performances have match the sensational success of Grand Slam at Roland Garros last year.

"I think it's great for our tennis and it's becoming one of the major sports back home," said Ivanovic.

Amazing considering the last chaos in 1999, civil war erupted in the Balkans as the old Yugoslavian federation collapsed and fragmented into half a dozen countries including Serbia, which emerged badly damaged economically.

Both Djokovic, 20, and Ivanovic, 20, have stated they suffered the backlash of that conflict in their formative years.

Ivanovic recalled how she had to practice when she was young in an empty swimming pool or find a well-equipped school she would bunk a tennis ball.

For Jankovic, 22, it is too painful to talk about that part of her life.

After showing promise and being whipped off to Florida, she had to watch as the family dropped with her father and brothers still in Belgrade.

"Conditions are pretty hard to me/me," said Jankovic's manager Alastair Gaitland. "But they can express themselves through sport."

AFP

Yulo Memorial golf gets going Jan. 26

THE 2ND EDITION OF DRELIBANO'S MEMORIAL member-guest tournament, the Jose Yulo Memorial, will be held on Jan. 26 and 27 of the club's rough Northeast South courses.

A banner field is expected when one of the country's most prestigious club championships is played over an expenditure is still open for entry of P2,500 for the member and P1,000 for the guest.

The MK Stableford method scoring, where aces and double eagles will count for five points, eagles four, birdies three, par two bogeys one, will be used for the 36-hole event.

Registration is still open through Mr. Sally Antifinal Mrs./Ms. (5/05/c/97 382, Daily Palafox and Percy Francis at (5/46/c/646/731, (5/6/46/c/647 to 18 in at The Makati Office at (Belle Tangco at (5/5/587 and (5/5/652).

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Cebu Pacific shelves public stock offer

Stops international roadshow for P6.84-B IPO

By Elizabeth Sanchez-Lacson

LOW-COST AIRLINE CEBU AIR INC., MORE POPULARLY known by its trade name Cebu Pacific, became the first casualty of the bear market triggered by fears of a US recession.

The Gokongwei-owned firm, scheduled by the lackluster, in global stock markets, has shelved installation to its public offering of 130.3-million shares.

Cebu Air, more popularly known under its trade name Cebu Pacific, said on a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange that it decided to "postpone until further notice" its proposed IPO "given the current volatility in global equity markets."

The company had planned to raise P12.9 billion from the stock offering.

Cebu Pacific also said that it would stop its international roadshow—a series of meetings with several foreign investors to drum up interest in the IPO—that started last week.

Cebu Pacific said it had generated positive feedback from international and domestic investors during a roadshow presentation. But despite this, the timing and execution of the IPO—set between late January and early February—was overtaken by "global economic concerns."

Global stock markets have been posting heavy losses since the start of the year as they grappled with the possible effects of a US-led economic recession.

The Manila stock exchange yesterday also felt the US Federal Reserve announced a surprise 75-basis point cut in its key interest rates to help boost a frail economy hit by high-risk credit problems in the housing sector.

Cebu Pacific had set its international roadshow and bookbuilding from Jan. 11 to 25, its domestic offer period was supposed to take place from Jan. 28 to Feb. 4 while the listing date was slated for Feb. 8.

The company's management has taken the view that despite strong interest in the IPO, it is not in the best interest of the stakeholders to pursue the listing at this time," Cebu Pacific corporate secretary Rosalinda Rivera said.

CEBU A4

BSP seen cutting rate next week

TITANOCO

THE BANGKO SENTRAL NG Pilipinas may live up some big earlier locked in its high-yielding special deposit accounts (SDAs)—alongside further cuts in its benchmark interest rates—to help pump-prime the economy this year, analysts said.

With the US Federal Reserve's 75-basis-point emergency cut in its targeted funds rate to 3.5 percent, the market has discounted that the BSP would follow suit and that it was just only a question of magnitude when the policy-making Monetary Board meets on Jan. 31.

BSP A4

Peso rises to 41.25:$1; stocks close 2.7% higher

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE PESO YESTERDAY RESPONDED strongly to close as the day's peak of 41.33 to the dollar after a surprise 75-basis-point cut in the US Federal Reserve's benchmark interest rates boosted the regional currency markets.

Stock prices also rebounded, closing 2.7 percent higher as bargain hunters swooped in, following a worst-day downturn and Monday's massive global selloff, dealers said.

The local currency gained 34.5 centavos from Tuesday's closing rate of 41.595 against the greenback, to upswing even strengthened by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' buying of dollars, currency traders said.

Volume at the Philippine Dealing System amounted to $817.2 million yesterday.

Local traders said expectations of the US Fed slashing interest rates further during its next meeting on Jan. 30 to avert a recession in the world's biggest economy boosted the appetite for Asian currencies, with the peso and the (Indonesian) rupiah leading the pack.

"Come PSEC (Federal Open Market Committee) meeting, an 82 percent chance of an additional 50-basis-point Fed cut is already factored in by the markets," said Pinal Commercial Banking Corp. senior vice

PESO B4

IN THIS ISSUE

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- **Japanese firm** starts $600-M coco plantation /B3
- **PLDT to buy back** shares; Piltel to give dividends /B5

Bernanke bites the bullet

Ron Nathan

ON TUESDAY, I OPINED THAT Bernanke should cut rates by 75 basis points and stop worrying around. Maybe someone read him up on the overhaul we are responsible. Anyway, on Tuesday night, just before the market was due to open with a catastrophic decline, Bernanke suddenly announced a 75-point rate cut, citing a weakening economic outlook and increasing downside risks to growth, a phrase that he used two weeks previously. Before the announcement, the futures were down as much as 800 points but afterward, it halved and by the close of trade, it had been reduced to 128 points.

So the overdue unconscious need for a calming effect not only on Wall Street but also on all other Asian markets. However, the initial strong recovery in the asian region did not hold its basic levels, particularly the Nikkei and the Hang Seng and only about half the percentage they've lost and Taiwan even saw reverses. The Asian futures are currently 40 points down so it looks as if markets will resume their downward drift.

Reducing the rate is only half of the equation; Congress must rapidly release the $150 billion stimulus package announced by President Bush and agreed with minor differences by both Republicans and Democrats. All Congress has to do is to approve the cuts after some minor compromise so that this money can find its way into the hands of the poor and middle-income citizens, as soon as possible in order to boost consumer spending.

Second, Congress appears unlikely to approve it for another two months thereby extending the pressure on the economy deepening the decline and delaying the eventual recovery. No amount of rate cuts will boost consumer spending, only cash. In effect, Congress is sabotaging the economy and instead responding to efforts to find the best candidates to win the election.

The Fed rate is now 3.5 percent and this caused banks and financial groups to recoup losses. BHP has its biggest gain (9.7 percent) in 26 years as copper and gold rallied. A strategist in Singapore said, "The Fed's move will obviously help the global economy and the problems we are seeing right now will work themselves out eventually. There is still room for recovery on the impact of a 1% slowdown."

Last week, I declared a recession and said it would not come, a position I adhere to. A bear market is totally different so I will declare this also. If the market falls 10 percent, that is a correction and is not particularly worrisome. If it falls 20 percent, that is a bear market and 28 indices including the World Index and the MSCI Asia Pacific index have declined over 20 percent and are therefore in a bear market. If a market falls 30 percent in one day, it happened in Hong Kong yesterday, that is a panda market for reasons previously given.

The MSCI Asia Pacific index added 3.9 percent in an index of 6 metals traded on the London Metal Exchange, including copper and nickel, gained 1.7 percent yesterday. Copper rose 2.2 percent, zinc 2.6 percent and gold $13 to $906 an ounce. HSBC surged 7 percent.

Asian currencies rose on speculation that further interest rate cuts will weaken the dollar and spur demand for higher-yielding assets in emerging markets. The peso rose to 41.25 and the central bank is expected to reduce key rates through zero to weaken the Fed.

WALL STREET

Dow	11,971 - 128
Nasdaq	2,297 - 47
Oil	$89 + 3.50
Gold	$1,19 + 0.10
Copper	$3.12 + 0.07

PUBLIC AUCTION

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PUBLIC OFFERING

Japanese firm starts $600-M coco plantation

Next phase involves the establishment of CME plant

By Amy R. Borja

A JAPANESE FIRM HAS STARTED last month a $600-million coconut plantation project in Southern Luzon.

Tokyo-based Pacific Biofuels Corp., which has teamed up with local firm BioEnergy Northern Luzon Inc., will convert and develop about 600,000 hectares of "public and non-disposable" farmlands and forest land into coconut plantations.

Planting activities have started last month following the project's groundbreaking in Iga Cantonera, Pagsanjan in Boca Siete.

In a statement, BioEnergy president Salazuli Balentin said the current plantation would be the biggest in the country.

Balentin said the project would be critical to the realization of the aims, committing the jobs it would create and the environment protection programs the company would implement.

The economic spindings that will be used are the "livelihood" money, Balentina added.

Pacific Biofuels president Shotaida Hayashida, in the same statement, said the plan was to process the coconut produced in the plantation into CME.

Hayashida added the joint venturer would put up a CME plant in Cayetano, Boca Siete, which will process the coconut produced in Southern Luzon.

The entire output of the plant will be shipped in Japan to supply the country's growing demand for biofuels, fish for fuel-dependent industries and manufacturing companies.

Hayashida said the plant's output "will not even be enough to fill Japan's huge biofuel requirements."

Japan's total diesel requirement reaches 48 billion liters a year, and to plans for a CME blend of 5 percent will create a huge demand for this substitute.

Japan is one of the four Asian countries planning to mandate the blending of CME with petro-diesel to reduce dependence on crude mineral oil.

The Pacific Biofuels and BioEnergy earlier forged an agreement with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources on the coconut planting and processing project.

So far, 68,000 hectares have been identified by the DENR technical personnel as suitable planting areas, which spans from Pagsajjad, Boca Siete, going up to Mesog town in Cayetano.

Earlier, another Japanese firm, Toyo Engineering Corp., said it would also put up a P60-billion CME manufacturing plant in Boca.

The venture will need some 600,000 hectares of coconut farms in new areas, which include Pangasinan, Boca Siete, Boca Siete and La Union.

Anscor unit acquires 2 US-based companies

By Elizabeth Sanchez-Lorenzo

A SUBSIDIARY OF the company in the Lim-ed Sons, Medrita Inc., has acquired two companies that were engaged in the placement of nurses and allied healthcare professionals for $14 million.

In a disclosure to the stock exchange, Anscor said Medrita had entered into a purchase agreement for the acquisition of the outstanding shares of Cirrus Holdings USA LLC and its affiliates, Cirrus Medstaff Holding LLC, collectively known as Cirrus.

These companies are based in North Carolina and are engaged in the nursing and temporary staffing and permanent placement of healthcare professionals in the United States.

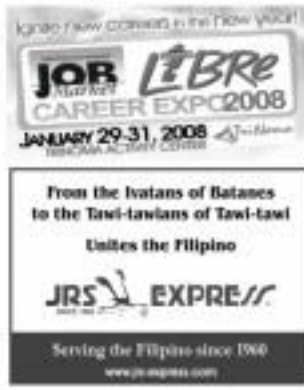
The purchase price was determined using a 0.67 multiple over 2007 sales of $20.7 million. The acquisition will be funded by internally generated cash, Anscor said.

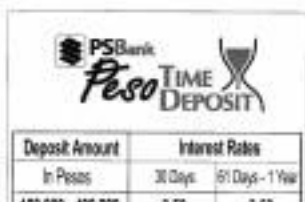
The purchase agreement took effect on Jan. 23.

Anscor said it acquired the firms because of the business potential of Cirrus, which was hoped to complement the existing Philippine-based nurse recruitment and placement agency business of Medrita.

Last year, Anscor said it was making a bet on the services and business sector as it invested $10 million in healthcare, nursing education, and a new venture for hotel renovations.

Anscor chair and president Andrew Soriano III said the investments would be powered by proceeds from Anscor's sale of its stake in port operator International Container Terminal Services Inc. and IPI Technologies.





Teves opposes cuts in tax collection goals

By Ma.Isabel F. Reyes

FINANCE SECRETARY MARGARITO Teves is not amenable to cutting the government's tax collection targets for the 2008 year.

Bolstering the tax collection target would not be a sensible move at this moment because a robustly growing economy could offset the dampening effects of a slowing peso on the collections of the Bureau of Internal Revenue and Customs, Teves said.

"The statement was made in response to calls for cuts in the tax collection targets of the BIR and Customs for 2008.

"The tendency of these institutions (BIR and BOC) is to focus only on the negative factors that pull down their collections. But there are also positive factors like economic activities," Teves told reporters.

He said the growing economy should lead to higher imports, which in turn should bring up the BOC's revenue collection. The expected increase in investments should also lead to higher collection of corporate and individual income taxes.

But the BOC has been vocal about its request for a cut in its collection target this year of P284.5 billion, which is 11 percent higher than its 2007 target of P255.2 billion.

The BOC fell short of its target last year, collecting only P25.2 billion short.

Customs Commissioner Napoleon Morales said the strong peso makes the BOC's goal unrealistic.

He said the agency was losing P3 billion in potential revenue for every unit of appreciation of the peso against the dollar.

A strong peso means lower peso equivalents of every dollar worth of imports and, therefore, lower duty collection.

Morales said the BOC's target was based on the assumption that the peso would hit as low as 45 against the US dollar, but the peso appreciated in a month higher rate of 40-41 to a dollar.

The BIR's collection target for the year was set at 1045 billion this year, 18 percent higher than its 2007 target of P765.9 billion.

SSS gains ₱1.6B from BDO-EPCI stake sale

Pension fund now looking at other investment options

By Doris C. Dumlao and Elizabeth Sanchez-Lacson

THE STATE-CONTROLLED Social Security System has completed the sale of its 15.8 percent stake in Banco de Oro Universal Bank or BDO-EPCI, gaining about P1.59 billion for the pension fund.

In a block sale transacted on the Philippine Stock Exchange on Jan. 18, the SSS sold a total of 190.1 million shares in the merged bank at P12.21 per share for a total of P17.28 billion.

"This is just the completion of our commitment to sell the shares," SSS president Emerson Aris Paz Bernardo said, adding that the proceeds from the sale would now look for alternative investments to make the most of the the BDO-EPCI proceeds.

Citing the SSS' financial statements, a source privy to the transaction said the fund acquired the block for P15.69 billion or P82.53 per share. The sale of the block of shares for P17.28 billion translated to a net gain of about P1.59 billion. The net gain, the source said, already factored in losses booked by the SSS in 2006% when the shares were devalued to only P83.30 per share.

The SSS agreed to sell its shares in the former EPCI Bank by accepting a tender offer by the SSS group in October 2006 at P90 per share. However, the proposed fund was not able to overcome the sale due to a pending case at the Supreme Court blocking an earlier sales agreement with the SM group.

In September 2007, the Supreme Court dismissed the case filed by certain investors to stop the sale of SSS' stake to EPCI. The ruling became final and executory last November.

With the latest ruling, the participation of SSS in the BDO tender offer became executory.

But as the SSS' participation was cleared at the time EPCIBank was already absorbed by BDO, its shares had to be converted into BDO shares. Its 187.8 million shares in EPCIBank were converted to the 208.1 million BDO shares which were recently sold to the SSS group.

When the two banks merged, each EPCI Bank share was converted into 1.8 BDO shares.

If the SSS were able to sell its 187.8 million shares in the old EPCIBank at P82 per share, the source explained that the purchase bond's proceeds would still amount to P15.4 billion.

The source said the fund did not incur losses from the recent transaction. While the price per share was lower, the source noted that the number of shares sold was bigger and that the purchase price also included interest earnings of P17.28 billion, or the amount the SSS would have generated if it sold the EPCIB shares at P92 per share earlier.

In the meantime, the completion of the sale of the SSS' 14.8 percent stake caused the SM group's equity in BDO to shoot to 20 percent, BDO president Nestor Tan earlier said.

Tan added that the bank now had a free float of 29 percent. The remaining minority shareholders are the Australia-based Ayala's Team Middle East Equity Philippines Inc. (4 percent), International Finance Corp. (2 percent) and United Overseas Bank of Singapore (1 percent).

The BDO-EPCI merger, so far the biggest transaction in the Philippine banking history, was completed through a share swap early last year and created the country's second biggest bank with P613 billion in assets.

What's P14B to SSS members?

THE CUTE ADMINISTRATION of GLORIA and the fly family... which owns the SM chain of malls and schnapped by Forbes as among the richest people in the world—finally commissioned that nonsense multibillion-peso deal that are have been hanging on, even turning to a little sooner campaign.

The Philippine Stock Exchange the other day posted a transaction involving more than 190 million shares of Equitable PCI Bank...in a "cross sale" at that!

It means that, actually the buyer and the seller made the prearranged deal outside the stock exchange. They just posted it on the PSE for formality.

No dashed spoil double-checked our sources, and they confirmed that the deal involved the same controversial EPCIB shares owned by the SSS.

Oops...that is our pension fund, remember, the Social Security System—which is supposed to be scrimping on benefits so as, its members—actually used our money.

And now in the sale of its EPCIB holdings, the manager of the retirement money of millions of ordinary workers, our beloved SSS, has just gifted the super-rich group some P14 billion!

What's P14 billion to the starving and the sick SSS members, anyway?

* * *

ACCORDING TO OUR sources, the SSS—still headed by its president, Emerson de la Paz, who is often out of the country—sold the EPCIB shares to Ramon del Rosa of PCI Capital, for a total of P17 billion, or at P13 a share.

But only two years ago, the other premier fund, the GSIS (Government Service Insurance System) sold its shares in the same bank to the same company owned by the same tycoons, at P92 each.

Now do the math! I'm not sure that I'm in for this!

If the GSIS sold its 95 million shares in EPCIB at P92 per, while the SSS sold its more than 239 million shares in the same bank at P13 per, how much of their stocks—GSIS and SSS—were killing themselves doing hard labor...did the SSS members just give up, as a result of this questionable deal between this state administration and the Sy family? Show the solution to your answer.

Right, it was only some P14 billion! Lost in the SSS investment forever!

To think, had the SSS and the GSIS sold their shares as one block, offering the bidders control over 45 percent of EPCIB, they could even have bitched a better price than the P92 per share paid by BDO for the GSIS shares.

In fact, GSIS president and general manager Winston Garcia insisted on such a plan, but apparently somebody close to the Palace, shall we say, "convinced" him.

To think, the SSS and the GSIS sold their shares as one block, offering the bidders control over 45 percent of EPCIB, they could even have bitched a better price than the P92 per share paid by BDO for the GSIS shares.

In fact, GSIS president and general manager Winston Garcia insisted on such a plan, but apparently somebody close to the Palace, shall we say, "convinced" him.

To think, my fellow SSS members, the controversial deal between the SSS and the Sy family was already forged as early as 2004—right before the presidential elections. Hmmm.

At that time, too, the headlines screamed about the "fertilizer scam," in which the amount involved was something like P700 million. And we did not hear the end of it.

This is a close outright P14 billion loss for the SSS members! Again—that's 14 billion! Everybody is quiet!

* * *

DET NIT loses a lot of votes in media over the Armed Forces bidding for 155mm howitzer sight attack helicopters.

Apparently, the noise is coming from the Bell 412 company called Poland PZL Swidnik, which the bidding technical committee earlier disqualified for failure to meet the specs.

It seems the media campaign targets Aaron Lemonjon, the supplier of McDonnell Douglas helicopters, which, in turn, won the second to win the AFP contract.

And we hear about to overpricing in media reports. Never mind that the price for the McDonnell Douglas helicopters, as mentioned in the reports, was actually the price for the "cheaper" model.

The military, those organizations tend pass as a conspiracy for AFP to cheat the taxpayers? I think we should see them for just keeping quiet.

But I just learned that the US main department already issued export permits for the delivery of those helicopters to the Philippines.

And so, I take it that, based on the media reports, the US government is now also involved in the alleged "cheating" here in the Philippines!

Methinks the problem is all in media. The AFP disqualified the prospective supplier Poland PZL from the race for failure to meet the bidding requirements, period.

And now it is getting a lot of media... well, unspecific.

If Poland PZL Swidnik thinks it really has a case against the AFP, it should file a sentimental case, and pay for the protest fee, which is 1 percent of the approved budget of (sure) than P1 billion.

Otherwise, it's all just noise.

* * *

THE SAVINGS war between the country's biggest television networks, ABS-CBN and GMA 7, seems to be waged in private...in evolving just them and the advertising agency.

It has now turned into ugly courtroom fisticuffs, possibly tainting the public standing of any media ratings agency including those for the dailies.

Look, GMA 7 already filed a case against the Kapisanan ng mga Broadcasters, ABS-CBN filed a case against AGB Nielsen, which is an international ratings agency.

The issue in the cases also involves the public. And so we need to know the truth.

Television is now the only viable entertainment medium. Movies are dead. That's why television makes the bankrolls even nowadays, and the movie business just rides on the TV-made superstars.

But more important to me, television serves as a crucial cog in the country's media machinery in its source of information to a more public than, say, newspapers.

Apparently, dubious ones offering money to favor a certain TV station, approached a new ratings agency.

We must let those who claim to know about the alleged anomaly to come out and speak. The public has the right to know.

THE FIRST batch of tourists flown in by China Southern Airlines' inaugural flight on Jan. 16, 2008, were welcomed with leis upon deploning at the Diosdado Macapagal International Airport. China Southern will fly twice a week from Guangzhou to Clark and back.

BSP seen cutting rate next week

From page B1

sustain our within-target inflation outlook," Tetangco said.

Benito Wilcox, treasurer at Land Bank of the Philippines, said Tetangco's statement signaled that another rate cut by the BSP might be forthcoming, but the local central bank did not want to send a signal that it would slash its rates by as much as its US counterpart did.

"What they can do is to cut the overnight (borrowing rate) but also lower the RRA rates to release more funds for lending, which is more productive to the economy," Virgara said.

The BSP is still more reluctant on its RRAs due to traditional mopping up tool—the overnight borrowing or reverse repurchase agreement, but funds locked up in this interbank-related deposit instrument have actually gone down in the last quarter of 2007 following the central bank's series of interest rate cuts.

From a high of about P480 billion in October last year, total RAM placements fell to P386.45 billion as of Dec. 28, although this was still higher than the P297.82 billion mopped up through overnight borrowings during the same period.

Head Commercial Banking Corp. same vice president Marcelo Ayes said global markets had factored in an 82-percent chance that another 50-basis-point cut would be made during the regular Fed meeting next week.

"With the total of 125 basis-point (US 4th cut) by the time the Monetary Board meets, a 50- to 75-basis-point cut may be possible given the backdrop of current inflation and growth outlook," Ayes said.

The BSP cut its overnight borrowing rate in November for the fourth time to 5.25 percent, the lowest in 11 years.

But even without the 75-basis-point US Fed rate cut, some analysts believed that the BSP might have to intervene more if the funds mopped up through the RRAs—either to help pump-prime the economy given an expected global slowdown or trim the local central bank's losses.

"The cost of servicing these deposits is substantial, but we note that the BSP saw the cost is worth the benefit of keeping the Philippine economy at bay. In 2008, in order to push some liquidity back to the economy as external headwinds appear, we expect the BSP to introduce measures that would reduce the attractiveness of the RRA as asset," according to a commentary by Deutsche Bank.

Michael Stansel, chief investment officer at San Life of Canada Philippines, said in a separate interview that the local central bank had enough flexibility to release some of the funds in the RRAs without stoking inflation.

"They are paying too much for the RRA facility for getting nothing out of their dollar assets and that's somehow an unsustainable formula," Stansel said. Boris C. Bonifacio

Peso rises to 41.25:$1; stocks close 2.7% higher

From page B1

president Marcelo Ayes.

On Tuesday, the US Fed cut its benchmark interest rate by 75 basis points, the most aggressive interest rate easing in the last 20 years. The emergency move was preceded by a bloodbath in global stock markets caused by concerns on the health of the US economy.

"The peso could have been stronger if not for the BSP intervention," a trader said, suggesting that the central bank was buying dollars at the opening rate of 41.30.

The trader said the strong countertrades on screen in the last quarter of 2007 had resulted and that the peso's rebound was mostly led by an upbeat regional sentiment.

"However, I feel that the market is no longer committed to take a strong long (buy) position on the peso due to continuing concerns on a global slowdown," he said.

In the equities market, the Philippine Stock Exchange index closed 79.86 points higher at 2,958.26, off a high of 3,004.05. Volume amounted to 2.5 billion shares worth P6.5 billion.

Advancers overwhelmed decliners 107 to 24, while 30 stocks were unchanged.

The broader all-share index gained 38.75 points to close at 1,894.32, after hitting a high of 1,917.15.

Markets are still weighing how effective the Fed rate cut and the US government's $145-billion stimulus package will be in reviving the ailing economy, Lim Tian Huat, an analyst at Accord Capital Equities.

"Investors remain cautious. Some analysts are saying this could just be a dead cat bounce, but I'm not that pessimistic. It's too early to make that conclusion," he said.

The United States is the Philippines' biggest export customer and is also home to hundreds of thousands of Filipino workers whose remittances back home help support the domestic economy.

Cebu Pacific shelves public stock offer

From page B1

However, she said Cebu Pacific's expansion plans were not at risk as a result of the postponement of its listing plans.

"The company has every intention of conducting an IPO once market conditions permit," Rivera said.

The company was to offer 72.02 million new shares and 65.45 million shares of Cebu Holdings Inc., the Gokongwei family's investment vehicle for its airline business, in new allotment option or additional shares that could be issued would have consisted of 30.33 million shares.

The shares were priced at between P85 each, which would have raised the company's market capitalization to P9.76 billion. The initial public offering (IPO) component or the sale of new shares would have raised P6.89 billion.

PLDT to buy back shares; Piltel to give dividends

By Riza T. Chikiamco

PHILIPPINE LONG DISTANCE TELEPHONE Co. (PLDT) and subsidiary Philippine Telegraph Inc. (PTel) are considering buying back shares and declaring dividends, respectively, according to PLDT group chair Manuel Pangilinan.

"If share prices are going down as much as it did, I would really like for us to consider a share buyback," he said in a briefing. "It's not really a decisive factor in terms of moving the share prices up especially in a market like this. You can't go against the market, really. But still I think PLDT is an excellent buy."

PLDT listed the possibility of giving special dividends or buying back shares last last year as a way of giving back more money to shareholders if PLDT does not use its growing income to acquire new companies or form new subsidiaries.

The telco's good financial performance in 2007 puts it in a position to buy back shares.

Pangilinan said that the telco was set to top its 2006 core net income of P33.3 billion and reported income of P91.1 billion.

"Both at the level of core and reported we will [go] above," he said.

PLDT also enjoyed a confidence boost on Tuesday from Japan-based NTT DoCoMo Inc.

The Japanese telco announced on its website on Tuesday that it had acquired 12.33 million additional shares of common stock of PLDT between March 2007 and January 22.

"The investment also strengthens DoCoMo's business tie-up with Smart Communications Inc. (Smart), PLDT's wholly-owned mobile communications subsidiary. Working with Smart, DoCoMo intends to develop mutually beneficial technologies and services, including international roaming between Japan and the Philippines," NTT DoCoMo said.

Also under consideration is a dividend for shareholders of PTel, which sold its fixed-line business to PLDT.

"It still stands. We'll have to consider a dividend by the first half," Pangilinan said.

PTel recently gave cash dividends to preferred stockholders on record as of December 20 last year.

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DA prepares to export pork

By Amy R. Remo

THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IS preparing to export an initial $200 million worth of pork to Singapore by March, said Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap.

Yap said in a briefing that quarantine officials from Singapore will arrive in the country next week to assess the local meat facilities and systems of key exporters.

Yap added that the country can start exporting pork as soon as it passes the requirements imposed by Singapore.

In a separate interview, Bureau of Animal Industry Director Dr. Jose Cabagnot said that Singapore's Agri Veterinary Authority would inspect at least 20 hog farms in Greater Luzon City, Davao and Cagayan de Oro.

"Those exports will evaluate the facilities of hog farms, farm inspection system implemented by the government, good husbandry practices, cleaning, disinfection, biosecurity measures and the animal traceability," Cabagnot said.

He added that the Singaporean officials were also set to meet with senior officials of the local National Meat Inspection Service and BAI.

Cabagnot noted that participating hog farms are all based in Mindanao, which has been declared free from foot-and-mouth disease for more than a decade.

Luzon, meanwhile, has yet to be certified as FMD-free by the Paris-based Animal Health Organization.

"We will [use export and safety requirements as well as drug residue tests built for meat and animal feeds, but more importantly we need to ensure that export prices are much, much higher than the cost of production," Cabagnot said.

Earlier, Yap said that once the country starts exporting to Singapore, other countries may follow suit, thus propelling the hog industry's growth.

As of last year, the country has been exporting an average of only about 2 percent of its total meat production.

In 2007, total production of the hog industry reached 1.89 million metric tons.

All it takes is political will

MINDANAWORLD

Jyoti Nagvani-Wilson

I ADMIRE THE PEOPLE IN SAVING THEIR IT is only in Davao where you can really say that the environment is smoke free and the new year celebration is noise-free.

This is due to the successful implementation of the city ordinances banning the use of firecrackers and pyrotechnics and smoking in public places.

Passed in 2002, the Comprehensive Anti-Smoking Ordinance is an improved version of a previous ordinance, which banned smoking in passenger vehicles plying the city route.

The five-year old ordinance identifies places where smoking is banned.

These include passenger vehicles in the city, accommodation and entertainment establishments like restaurants, bars, movie houses, hotels and places where people meet; government offices; parks and other places "controlled exclusively for public purposes by government agencies."

The ordinance also directs business establishments to set up separate smoking rooms, which must be air-conditioned, at least about 1/4 of the total area/cubicular area of the establishment and have an exhaust fan.

Fines and punishments

Violators of the anti-smoking ordinance face a fine of between P500 and P2,000, imprisonment of between one and six months, or both, depending on the court.

Establishments found violating the ordinance also face the possibility of being shut down.

The ordinance was passed even before the national government implemented its version, the Tobacco Regulations Act of 2003, or Republic Act 9211.

But despite the strong support of the citizenry, there were also many establishments and vendors that protested the implementation of the ordinance, citing its negative impact on their businesses.

Even the tourism group did not support the ordinance as they say groups that it would discourage tourists from visiting the city.

The city government, however, did not waver and in time, the Dabawenyos appreciated the benefits of the ordinance and learned to live with it.

Several local government units in the country and in foreign countries have emulated the city by passing their own anti-smoking ordinances.

In several discussion groups, the city earned praises from other local government units who saw its implementation as really intended to protect the welfare of the residents.

A quiet new year

Also passed in 2002, Ordinance No. 088-02 prohibits "the manufacture, sale, distribution, possession or use of firecrackers or pyrotechnic devices and such other similar devices and the exploding of firecrackers and other similar explosives within the territorial jurisdiction of Davao City."

The ordinance came about after Mayor Rodrigo Duterte realized that firecracker explosions during holidays, particularly during the Yuletide season, injured reckless residents and even caused fire.

This prompted the mayor to ask the city council to eventually pass the ordinance complete with the penalty clause.

Under the provisions, first time offenders face a fine of P1,000, imprisonment of between 20 days and a month, or both, depending on the court.

Repeat offenders face a stiffer penalty of P1,000-P3,000, imprisonment of as long as six months, or both.

Since the passage of the ordinance, hospitals in the city have been free of injuries caused by firecracker explosion and the Bureau of Fire Protection did not report any fire caused by pyrotechnics.

Last Yuletide season, however, about 160 city residents, most of them young boys, were arrested for firecracker binges.

The increase in number of arrests came about after Mayor Duterte dangled a P1,000 bounty for those who could identify anyone exploding firecrackers in their neighborhood.

Last year, some local government units have expressed their desire to regulate firecracker explosions.

Some of those have even proposed to follow Davao City's example despite the opposition of some individuals who peddle these distinctive explosives.

The city's successes in these two anti-vice ordinances have made it one of the most recognized local government units not just in the country but in the world.

All it really takes is strong political will and a visionary that prepares for her.

Jyoti Nagvani-Wilson is a strong and vocal advocate for the development of the island. She is chair of Ani Bagan Foundation, Phil. Cell Centers Alliance, Mindanawon Tech Pro Schools Association, Mindanao Rep. Export Development Council. Email comments: jyotiwilson@yahoo.com.

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BUSINESS

Fed cut gives US stock bulls hope for bottom

NEW YORK—THE US FEDERAL Reserve's emergency interest rate cut on Tuesday would be the last and best hope for stock market bulls on Wall Street, after the worst start to a year on record.

But the surprise rate cut could allow bring an end to the huge rally in US bonds.

After troubles in stock markets across Asia and Europe on Monday when US markets were closed for a holiday, S&P 500 stocks looked headed for a plunge on Tuesday, but the Fed's surprise rate cut smoothed the worst of the bleeding and raised hopes that US selling may be overdone.

Before the run on announcement US Treasuries prices had soared, sending yields to their lowest in four years as investors dumped riskier assets, before giving back some of the price gains.

Analysts who usually study prices and volume statistically said the stock market appeared to have now seen that authentic selling that could help it build a base from its "oversold" condition.

The Dow Jones industrial average was down more than 3.5 percent before the 12,000 level on opening Tuesday, before sending down only 1.02 percent at 11,975.42.

Similarly, the benchmark S&P 500 index fell 3.78 percent before recovering to end down only 1.3 percent at 1,326.62.

And the Nasdaq plunged 4.40 percent before bouncing to end down 2.04 percent at 2,292.27.

Here so, there is still a pause. bid for more downside in stock prices and bond yields that could lure investors? Talib, analysts said.

At Tuesday's open, the Dow broke below the 12,000 level set. so it broke through support levels around 11,500 last week.

According to the statistics, the 11,500-11,600 levels on the Dow are not out of question for the Dow if the market were to fall further.

For the S&P 500 index, they said further downside could see the benchmark index finding support on the 1,226-1,300 range.

According to Gaurav Fitzgerald, the S&P 500 drop to an intra-session low of 3,276.29 possibly marks a decisive break from which the broader market could mount a rebound, albeit gradually.

The Nasdaq briefly crossed into bear market threshold earlier on Tuesday, dropping more than 20 percent from its 52-week closing high of 2,861.51, but the near-term picture had been helped by the Fed's more-soothing rate cut, analysts said.

"Investors have threats in the

Oil falls below $89 on recession fears

SINGAPORE—OIL RETREATED below $90 yesterday after making a nervous recovery in an emergency US interest rate cut fueled a global financial market sell-off but failed to halt recession fears in the world's top consumer.

In a rare policy move outside of its ordinary meetings, the Federal Reserve slashed interest rates by 75 basis points to 3.5 percent on Tuesday in biggest to more than 25 years and a move that some underscored unsettled of panic.

Oil crude fell 35 cents to $88.68 a barrel early yesterday afternoon after falling as low as $88.11 a day ago until a global stock markets rose.

London Brent crude shed 43 cents to $88.08 a barrel, above $2 below its close on Friday before the worst of the turmoil hit global markets.

Some analysts said traders had been selling oil and other commodities to cover margin calls in other markets.

"I think a lot of people realize the underlying weakness of the economy is still unfolding ... traders feel that there are too many losses still waiting to be revealed," said Robert Ivanuc, manager at Mitsubishi Corp.'s risk management unit.

Oil prices plunged on Monday and Tuesday, as world stock markets enormously posted their steepest losses since Sept. 11, 2001, amid widespread concerns that the largest from the US and it and housing crisis could trigger a recession, making the steady rise in oil demand that has fueled

prices for five years.

While down almost 12 percent from their all-time peak above $100 a barrel on Jan. 3, oil prices are still up more than 60 percent from a year ago, supported by tight economy levels. Opec can put restraints and strong demand from investors seeking higher returns and a possible hedge against inflation.

Goldman Sachs said that while oil prices could slide into the low $80s if spectacular big-headed their bring a position, strong fundamentals would probably prevent funds from selling out completely.

US crude oil stocks, which rose for the first time in nine weeks last week after hitting their lowest since 2004, are expected to have risen by another 3.1 million barrels last week, a preliminary Reuters poll found.

The government inventory data, due out a day later than usual on Thursday due to Monday's US holiday, are also likely to show a 1.4 million-barrel rise in gasoline stocks as refiners begin to build up supplies ahead of summer, the poll showed.

Oil's recent slide has relieved pressure on the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) to agree on a production increase when it meets on Feb. 1.

Several Opec ministers have hinted that it will keep production steady at the meeting.

On Tuesday, UAE's oil minister Mohammed al-Hamli said the recent price drop was a "positive thing."

Reuters

US airlines drop fuel fee increase

NEW YORK—MAJOR US AIRlines on Tuesday rolled back a fuel surcharge increase aimed at offsetting soaring oil prices as consumers balk at higher fares, and worries over the economy grow.

American Airlines, United Airlines, Delta Air Lines Inc., Continental Airlines, and US Airways Group Inc. all rolled back the increase on Monday, according to fare tracker FareCompare.com.

AMR Corp.'s American Airlines initiated the increase last week, doubling its domestic fuel surcharge to $40 per round-trip fare, except in markets where it faces low-fare competition.

Northwest backed off the increase because of limited initial matching by Continental, a company spokeswoman said.

"It's basically failed," Rick Seaney, chief executive of FareCompare.com, said of the fare increase. "It doesn't surprise me at all with all the economic bad news the last few days."

The aborted increase marks the second failure to raise ticket prices in as many weeks as fears the US economy is on the verge of recession mount.

A fuel surcharge increase initiated by UAL Corp.'s United Airlines the previous week was withdrawn after rival carriers failed to match the $100 fare.

Underscoring concerns about the economy, the US Federal Reserve on Tuesday slashed a key interest rate by three-quarters of a percentage point, the biggest rate cut in more than 23 years.

"With fuel at $100 a barrel and you're still banking off, that tells me that they're now seeing the resistance of the consumer," said travel expert Terry Trippler of TrippleTravel.com.

Fuel expenses have historically ranged between 10 per cent and 15 percent of an airline's operating costs. But with oil near record levels, that expense has jumped to between 25 percent and 40 percent of operating costs, according to the Air Transport Association.

With consumers showing signs of straining their pursestrings, airlines will likely seek to boost revenue and offset higher costs by reducing the number of low-or-no-profit seats they offer on each plane, Trippler said.

United-parent UAL posted a fourth-quarter loss on Tuesday burdened by skyrocketing fuel costs and the sluggish economy.

Most carriers are expected to post losses in the fourth quarter as the economy hurdles to resume a recovery that began in 2006 after five years of losses.

The dour outlook for the industry led to a 4 percent decline in the Amex airline index .XAL, led by an 8 percent drop by US Airways, which is heavily exposed to the US market.

UAL fell 2 percent, while AMR slipped 3.4 percent.

Reuters

LIFESTYLE

Editor Chele Batol-Formoso

YEE Seng

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The best way to enjoy tikoy

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EVERY YEAR, AT JUST about this time, I get requests for a tikoy recipe or ways to cook tikoy other than the all too-predictable dipped in egg and fried.

It is 2008 and tikoy lovers contain the same request. So, in time for the season when we say Kung Hei Fat Choy, I present tikoy, the best I have tasted in years...a recipe, as well as imaginative ways of preparing it. Thanks to Hsing Palacol's grannies of a chef, Wu Ji Mao.

No Chinese New Year is ever be complete without tikoy. Speaking of which, I have not tasted tikoy as good as Mahal Hsing's.

Unlike the others, Ihsin is completely soft and will not be hardcounter stick for those with dentures! It is so flavorful that even the regular blue variant is so milky delicious!—the finest appearance do or-gluten—anything else will fall short!

EXECUTIVE Chef Wu Ji Mao

Furthermore, it does not absorb oil when fried. The result is a nice cake on ends in flavor, with perfect texture—so smooth that it melts so delightfully in your mouth. No ring of wax sticking teeth, tongue and throat for this exquisitely done rice cake!

So, if there is a tikoy man in my book, chef Mao is the one.

Unfortunately, the chef speaks no word of English. Thanks God for Warren erstwhile Inn Pharmer was there to help while Irene Sui translated.

Tikoy's significance

"One of the most ubiquitous sights at Chinese New Year banner's a Chinese New Date cake (also known as Nian Gao, which translates to tikoy)," said Mao. "To the Chinese, the word nian means 'year' while gao means 'higher.' Taken together, the words represent progress in the new lunar calendar year.

"Households believe that nian gao must unfailingly be offered every year to the Kitchen God ... the family 'feeds' the sticky pudding to the Kitchen God one week before Lunar New Year to ensure a report in their favor upon his return to heaven. It is a way of ensuring that the god's mouth would be too crammed with cake to coherently present a negative report."

Chef Mao added, "The important thing is to have lots of rice cakes on the eve of Chinese New Year to bring good luck and prosperity. Our colorful fish-shaped version of tikoy signifies auspicious luck according to Chinese belief.

"Whatever it is, nian gao is a lip-smacking fare to be enjoyed in the company of friends and family."

Mao's Basic Tikoy Recipe

300 g glutinous rice flour
200 g brown sugar
150 g cornstarch
100 g vegetable oil
200 g water
½ c coconut milk

- Heat a large cut with vegetable oil.
- Stir in ingredients slowly and continue to stir. After mixing all the ingredients well, cook it for at least 1 hour until thick and sticky.

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BAHAY Cuon. Rice vermicelli stuffed with ground pork and mushrooms

BY POPULAR demand, the family dining room became a restaurant

FROM the outside, Bawal looks like an ordinary house.

Grandmother's Vietnamese cooking

PHO BO, rice noodles and thinly sliced beef soup

BANG Bo Hue, pork and beef knuckle soup

CHUOI Chung, Marsala banana with tapioca and coconut milk

Text and photos by Linda B. Bolilo

As more and more people came, eager to taste their food, a family turns their dining room into a restaurant

GOI Cuon, Vietnamese fresh lumpia

IT MAY NOT BE home-cooking exactly but at Bawal's, the Vietnamese restaurant off the busiest track in Barangay Bukal, Silang, Cavite (0920-9722934), it will be definitely home-eating.

The place, designed like a traditional tall Asian house with the sliding capiz, is the renaissance home of Filipino lifestyle Technologist and his Vietnamese wife, Bip Huynh Vo.

According to their youngest child, Paul Anthony, the restaurant was not planned. "The dining [area] was made to seat a number because of our big family but then my sisters invited friends often and the friends noticed if they could bring their friends even if they paid for the food," he said.

When the visits became more frequent, the family decided they might as well have a regular restaurant.

The Technologists learned the family dining area into a restaurant while keeping their living quarters strictly off limits.

Except for the fact that there are more tables and chairs than you normally find in a family home, the restaurants is no top like a home, with a reception area on one corner where guests can wait to be served.

Bawal is Vietnamese for grandmother, which the young Technologist said his mother had become many times over. Six friend's cousins grandmother's.

Opened in April, Technologist described their host as "a healthy mix of traditional and fusion cooking." While the mix—their signatures—dishes were done with nurturing for said side dishes were uncommon even in the Filipino palate.

The first menu, Technologist said, was a family project. It consisted of everyone's favorite, from his parents to his brothers like Enrico and his sister, Ana Maria, who were then still in high school.

Their grandchildren.

Schoolmates

Technologist is in charge of the kitchen but mother and son share the cooking chores. They had formal lessons, schoolmates in fact, at Nha Viet Huu Phu Ha, a cooking school in Ho Chi Minh City. Like farmers Belgian. "We actually had some classes together," Technologist said.

"My mother took up traditional Vietnamese cuisine while I studied Vietnamese fusion, [learning] to use my own style and develop a different technique," he said.

Specifically, mom prepares the broth for the various soup dishes, the pho items that most Filipinos know of Vietnamese cooking, while the son does the sautéed items and sauces. The chef de partie does the grilling and the frying.

Though it was the family's first venture into the restaurant business in the Philippines, Technologist said his mother, who met his father when he worked in Vietnam, ran a Filipino restaurant in her home country.

The restaurant, which can accommodate up to 30 diners, is open only Friday to Sunday from breakfast to dinner. Technologist said that was "because we want to live life beautifully. A healthy mix of work and rest. A day of preparation, three days of operations and three days of rest."

Though people could walk in anytime on the days the restaurant was open, Technologist said it was preferable that customers made reservations and pre-ordered so they did not have to wait. The restaurant is open when the five customer or customers say they will be there.

Chain opens 11th branch in Taytay

CABALEN, THE EAT-ALL-YOU-can, eat-all-you-want buffet restaurant, has opened its 11th branch in Old City Taytay in Rizal.

The new branch, more modern looking than the others, can accommodate 150 people. It mixes the old and the new. White and yellow walls and bright lighting give the restaurant a younger, cheerier appeal while mahogany tiles, glass chandeliers, wall sconces and wooden furniture lend a comforting Filipino feel to the place.

Designed by architect Juli Intengan, the new branch spread to mango chairs and have a wide open entrance for a more inviting look.

The eyes are then immediately drawn to the bright interiors and the buffet tables.

Cabalen offers Pampanga's renowned dishes like Sizzling Sisig, Kare-Kare, Dalaki, Dinuguan, Crispy Crablets, Bopis, and Kalderetang Baka, among others.

It also features the famous make-your-own Ayala-Indy but Pot Jamang, healthy and zero Trans-fat dishes like Crispy Kangkong, Cabalen Lumpiang Shrimp, Pakete na Pangat, Bico, Mga Kalabasa and Minatamis na Saging with sago are among over 50 dishes featured in the buffet spread.

People who celebrate special occasions in the restaurant get freebies like festive goodies cut out, high chairs for baptismal parties, and gift certificates for catching and birthday packages.

Cabalen can also provide catering services (021 9230 or 913 0922) in three organizing parties at home, office or other venues. Its menu selections include Filipino, Thai and Japanese.

Other Cabalen: (02) 29 0151 branches are at 67 Sitio Interior, QC; 2/L SM City North Edsa, QC; 4/L Bldg. B SM Megamall, Mandaluyong City; 2/L Robinsons Place Manila; G/L Glorietta 3, Makati City; G/L Robinsons Imarilla, San Fernando, Pampanga; 3/L Clark Avenue Festival Mall, Balibago; G/L, SM City Clark C&E Clark Field, Pampanga; G/L Ata Isetta Grand East Mall; and 2/L Trinoma Ayala Mall.

GUESTS OF HONOR. Hiam Pineda, Elmes Macapagal, Mayor Jerie Garcia, Gov. Cadette Yranzuli, Marital Meiers-Shaw, Jose Lovegren, Eka Reyes

VARIETY of noodles to

RESTAURANT interiors

KAPAMPANGAN specialties

DINING OUT

Wine and dine

Westgate Alabang offers a wide variety of places for wining and dining—Mesha tuneun, Spanish, Hawaiian, even Filipino. Cabalen specializes Spanish and Filipino fare. For Mediterranean cuisine, there is Rustratic Restaurant and Wine Bar. If you like steak, there is Match, Hearty Hawaiian fare is what Hula Hula offers. At Wine Depot you can get wines to enjoy at home. Westgate Alabang is at Filinvest Alabang Corporate City, Alabang, Muntinlupa City; (632) 771 no. 270, westgate@filinvest.com.

CALIFORNIA PIZZA KITCHEN, known for its mouth-baked pizzas, has added hot new items to its menu—Pan-seared Salmon and Blue Crab Cakes. They are available at CPK branches in Glorietta 2, Ayala Mall, Makati; Corte de la Palmas, Alabang Town Center; Shangri-La Plaza Mall, Mandaluyong; Level M2 Trinoma Mall, Quezon City; Promenade Greenhills, San Juan; and Power Plant Mall, Rockwell Center, Makati.

KYOTO Robinsons Galleria's The Fireplace serves a selection of seafood cocktails this January: Prime cuts of beef are available at the Market Café. 240 1330.

CENTURY Park Hotel offers strawberry desserts—Strawberry Baked Cheesecake, Strawberry Lemon Cream Puff and Choco Strawberry Mousse Cake this month at Deli Snack; 5282800 or 5288888.

KAI BAI KEN dishes out Japanese cuisine at affordable prices. The restaurant has 55 branches nationwide. For Visayas-Mindanao, call 5867200 or 3088-3282883.

COCOMAMA (3/F The Ledge, Shangri-La Plaza Mall, Mandaluyong City; 8180400 | ellie's Cocoa Beach Specialty Restaurant, Japanese, Aloha Fiberchicken Pupu. Other favorites include Island Pasta, Omelets and Fresh Toast Combo Plates, Groovy Waffles and Pancakes, Coronama Steaks and Chops.

CLAMDADDY Crabhouse and American Grill (5358675; 9554016) serves Clamdaddy family Seafood Feasts and Cajun Seafood Basket. All-time favorites include Clamdaddy's Ruby-Back Ribs and Clamdaddy's Bing Sampler. Other must-try dishes are Jambalaya and Crab Boiled, Rotisserie-style Grilled Lobster, Lemon Cream Mussels and Fiberfried Shrimps.

Be surprised and win a prize

People scream for ice cream the whole year-round

By Pros Razigbak

ICE CREAM IS NOT A SEASONAL TREAT

That is why Nestlé, a multinational packaged-food company that also offers frozen novelties, has not waited until the sun is at its fiercest to introduce the new Nestlé Ice Cream Drumstick with Kit Kat.

The surprise twist to this new drumstick is a whole Kit Kat finger at the center of the rich, creamy chocolate ice cream and crispy wafer cone.

"We've been known to launch a lot of innovative [ice cream] flavors and different toppings but not to a degree of actually giving you a whole Kit Kat under [the drumstick]," says Angela Angeles Jr., Nestlé Ice Cream consumer marketing manager.

Drumstick is one of Nestlé's pioneer and best-selling frozen treats, a year-round favorite even during the cooler months.

"Contrary to the old-school philosophy that ice cream is just for summer, we actually sell a lot during Christmas dun it's like our mini-summer or another peak season," says Angeles.

"Frozen novelties like drumstick ... are considered impulse [treats] that can be eaten anywhere, anytime."

In line with the launch of Nestlé Ice Cream Drumstick with Kit Kat, Nestlé is holding the promo "Surprise Me."

The promo offers consumers a chance to win one of five Apple iPod Touch 8GB. To join, mobile-phone subscribers must send photos or videos of their most surprised look as they hold an unwrapped Nestlé Ice Cream Drumstick with Kit Kat.

Each participant can send as many as five entries each day. To enter, subscribers must type in DRUMSTICK <bid name><space><gender><address> and send to 2009, or upload the photos or video to www.icecreamlife.ph with his/her full name, age, home and e-mail addresses, and telephone number.

Subscribers can increase their chances of winning by asking friends and relatives to enter for them many by registering their name and e-mail address at www.icecreamlife.ph.

Voting may also be done via text by typing DRUMSTICK VOTE <your choice> then sending to 2009.

Winners will be drawn Feb. 4.

WOMAN Today's Abed Barrios and her winning surprised look at Nestlé's Surprise Me promo launch

ALL-NEW Nestlé Ice Cream Drumstick with KitKat

SUCCULENT RIBS
Meat lovers may want to try the succulent tender-to-the-bone baby back ribs marinated and grilled the Hawaiian way by Big Kahuna. Before grilling, the ribs are dusted with a pungent rub of seasoned spices. The ribs come with a hefty serving of mashed potatoes and mixed vegetables. Big Kahuna is in Eastwood City Walk 1, call 4112310 or text 0917 8WWCITY.

The best way to enjoy...

Turn to page F7

■ Pour into a deep round dish and cool. After a few hours of cooling, refrigerate.

■ Recipe makes one standard round tray of silky.

Mimi's cooking techniques and various ways of serving silky:

■ Cut silky into cubes. Line them in a steamer and steam for 15 minutes. When the silky is hot, transfer to a serving platter and sprinkle top with grated fresh coconut meat and serve.

■ Our special rice cakes are best enjoyed when sliced into strips (as thick as your pinky finger), wrapped in spring roll wrapper and deep-fried. It is recommended to serve with honey. Shift jam or sprinkled sugar.

The chef further added my fancy by describing his New Year menu suggestive the Emperor's Feast.

Say it said, "This chef is a total professional." Exactly why this particular menu is one we should all savor. Nothing is spared, no substitutions allowed for his dishes. Thus, his rendition of an Emperor's feast is one that truly befits royalty.

Perhaps it is a common practice to the kitchens of Malacañang Palace but this time I am moved more by curiosity. Apparently, there is a dish that Imelda had[illegible] it is called Sin Sang, which took them quite a while to perfect since securing the authentic ingredients had been difficult.

The dish is described as something that "brings good fortune with the Chinese cuisine of Sin Sang. This Chinese salad, made from slices of raw fish, shredded vegetables, herbs and spices, is believed to bring vigor, prosperity, and longevity for the coming year.

"Besides being full of flavor and texture, yee sang is loaded with symbolic meaning," said Mau. The raw ingredients signify the renewal of life, and the sound of the word for fish in Cantonese sounds like the word for prosperity. Family members gather and, together, they toss the salad with their chopsticks, making a wish for abundance and prosperity before enjoying the meal."

If you ask me, I prefer food to chasers and symbols, mouth-open fingers and working jaws...

So join me as I set my way to good fortune, health and wealth. Here's wishing you the best of the year of the earth ox! Cheers!

Call Shang Makati at 812[illegible]

E-mail the author at [illegible]

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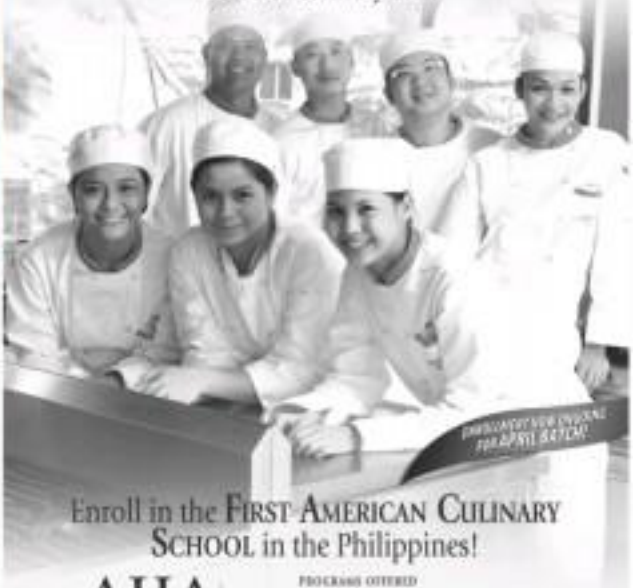

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COUNTRY COOKING
Micky Fenix

Going native

I HEARD IT AGAIN FROM BARlet vendors, the superiority of native catfish (hito) to the variety some call dalagang bukid that are bigger and fleshier.

At the wet market, one can tell the native catfish by its smaller size and the gray specks on its back. Also, the native catfish costs much more, going against the rule of thumb that imported items are more expensive.

Why? Because the native fish far less in size. It seems that its preferred kinds are easier and faster to breed. Hardly ever cultured, the native catfish is usually caught in rice fields together with its cousin, the rare sandfish (dalag).

But because of the use of pesticides, many by-products of rice fields can no longer be found including frogs, snails and eels.

One can only sigh at the thought of not being able to taste again those hyperbolic, dizzying to Gilda Cordero Fernando ("Heaven, folks." Philippine Food and Life), they include sautéed in coconut milk with lemongrass, *arroz caldong palaka* or frogs boiled with malagkit and kinchay, *pinakbang palakol*, boiled kalabaw eaten with salt.

Paying the price

The less of us who savour by the capsicum flavor of the native hito pay top price per to serve more meat. Also as it should taste—fresh, clean and moderately fat.

Native chicken, too, is far superior to the year-doomed chicken one can find in the grocery. At the wet market, you can be tricked into believing that because the chicken is slaughtered upon purchase then it must be more flavorful. But those are noticeable chicken with tasteless meat.

Native chickens, with colorful brown and black feathers rather than white, are still sold alive in Manila markets, sitting in one corner of a stall awaiting their true. Each piece costs about P300. Either you bring home your purchase alive or ask the retailer to dress the chicken for you. There are merchants that sell dressed native chicken for P200 a piece, too.

In provincial markets, or at least in Iloilo, the native chicken seems to be only what market prices will bear. Its wonder their liquid, *Amazed* and *Heaven* to mean are always a couple bucks.

I get strange looks when I tell people we only use native chicken when we cook the Pansy St. sarabang stewed chicken in coconut milk).

Isabel's native chicken stew (above) and leche (below)

Slow cooking

Their main objection is free-range chicken is too tough for the teeth. But I tell them it only takes a bit more simmering, slow cooking, a plus is flavor with any of the chicken recipe—*afritada, tinola*, etc.

As for barbecue, a younger chicken is needed and you only need a soft crackle to tell you if what they sell can be cooked to roast.

The other great ingredient when using native chicken is the egg inside, a yolk or yolks for the *tinola*. I found many meals only with these yolks in Bonn City while in a conference in Bonn. Once went cooked an adobo made on eggs with chicken.

I am also aware of the tastes of turkey from native pig. It has very little fat. The skin is thin on that, when cooked, the skin always crisp longer. The meat also is much more flavorful probably because of what it is fed.

My friend, who cooks well, said the food consisted of chopped stalks of banana (lately mixed with diced and boiled, the latter was produced from the milling of rice grains. Apparently the latter dry-roast native pork, food garbage (bacon bahoy) just will not do. The mix must be the same as in computer programming—garbage in, garbage out.

Likewise, garlic is small and more potent than the imported variety that have huge pieces. Are two or three small cloves are enough to make a native guise, the first step in most Filipino cooking involving usually the trinity of garlic, onion and tomatoes.

Bonn is known for its native garlic and bundled on sacks of them are sold in markets and at highway stalls. Guilty (remember the Chinese proverb) and a little of it goes a long way.

Also in Bonn, when you say onions, you must mean the small-bits. It is *sibuyas*. Tagalog elsewhere and for many, it is called can be called the native onion.

While bundles may long for the sweet and sugar-coated, some an aversion about storing just-harvested bulbs, unless the apple-with salt sprinkled on it. Only native tomatoes will do when cooking *sinigang*. My hobbyist friends brag for the small sour variety not only for the acidity sour soup it but also for its fine essential oils, mango with tomatoes with *bagoong*, as dressing.

Sometimes, though, local men be defined as natives but is not. Consider the native cooked products that restaurants include in their menus and not markets sell. The native meat looks like veal and it has the same taste quality; as only touch to the tender fish meat. But anyone who knows his/her fish at sea knows cod cannot exist in tropical waters.

But because the supposed native veal is cheaper than the imported product, people think they lucky since that they can eat a big piece of the fish at such a price. The higher price they have to pay though is the involuntary exertion of the courage of from eating too much of the pseudo veal. That sometimes takes a whole day and keeps you at home.

E-mail the author at pinayfood06@yahoo.com

THE CONSUMER

Exercise your purchasing power

By Linda B. Bolido

READER ROSARIO LLAMOSO wanted to know if it was legal for establishments to refuse the practice of accepting only cash for certain purchases.

She said she bought a replacement earphone worth P896 for her daughter's iPod. The establishment said they only accepted cash for accessories.

She referred her question to the Department of Trade and Industry. Maria Aris, supervising trade and industry development specialist of the DTI National Capital Region Legal Affairs Center, said "there is no trade and industry law being violated in the said incident since it is a management and marketing policy of the said store. The consumers are not implementing the said policy and those who are willing to patronize the said store should abide with the said policy."

He said the customer could take up the issue with management but he pointed out that consumers "have the option to choose and patronize business establishments that you believe you could trust and (will be) comfortable to deal with."

By letting management know they find a policy objectionable and bringing their business elsewhere, consumers can help effect the change themselves.

After-sales service

I wrote to thank Dexter Ngo, Thomas Meng and Malu Bolante of Electrolux for acting promptly on my complaints.

I am glad to know that the Electrolux officials realize the poor after-sales service can undermine all their efforts to come up with superior products that try to respond to the evolving needs of consumers.

As I told them, I was quite happy with my Electrolux appliances—a White Westinghouse refrigerator, a cathedral vacuum cleaner and second Electrolux vacuum) and, best of all, the fully automatic washing machine that had been a truly liberating equipment, letting me do many other things while it did the work.

But while the machines perform efficiently, it is the humane, speedy-ally those in the service center that have frustrated me. They have adopted the practice of making clients leave messages instead of answering calls immediately.

The system is frustrating not only because you do not know when is if they will ever return your call but sometimes all you really need is information. In fact, I suspect that is all many callers want as the appliances, from my experience, do not really seem to need frequent servicing.

When I called yesterday, for instance, all I wanted to know was where I could get replacement door bags for my vacuum.

Not every caller has a technical problem. Sometimes all they want to know is how to get to the service center.

In other companies, there is somebody who answers questions immediately. More complicated issues, particularly technical matters, are then referred to the proper departments.

I wish Dexter, Thomas and Malu success in their efforts to streamline the operations of their service centers. I hope they can get their service staff to realize that, while consumers are willing to pay more for a quality product, they are also very sensitive about the after-sales support they can get.

Change suggested

Speaking of after-sales support, I suggest consumer avoid using the self-addressed stamped envelope all the information about the customer in question.

I had to wait back one of those cards after I got a new color television set. A few days later, I got a call from somebody who said he was with the Philippine Appliance Specialists and who informed me that I won in a raffle.

As I do not remember joining a raffle, I asked how he got my name. He gave me a story about how all voluntary cards were sent to the franchisees and they were all entered in a raffle.

I never heard of such a foundation so I called up the company to ridicule it. I smiled the card. Not surprisingly they denied sending their warranty cards anywhere. They had not even heard of the foundation.

The Afternoon chore has a good system. Then some people have you fill up the warranty cards before you leave the store so you can not have to mail anything and have your information available to anyone who cares to look.

Send letters to The Consumer, *Inquirer Lifestyle, 5th Floor, Philippine Daily Inquirer, Chino Roces Ave. ext. Makati City, Metro Manila 1231*, or e-mail lbolido@inquirer.com.ph

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	TORTILLA CLASS by Chef Ed Quimbo 10am-4pm	P1,600
	QUICK BREAD by Irene Zialcita 9-12pm	P1,600
Feb 12(Wed.)	CHINESE BANQUET I by Chef Antonette Arao 10am-4pm	P1,600
	BASIC FLOWER ARRANGEMENT by Mary Ann Ramirez 10am-4pm	P1,200
	MINI CLASS I CHINESE 101 by Mary Grace 9-12pm	P1,000
Feb 13(Thu.)	<VERLOOK I WISH YOU'LL EATING DISHES by Chef Dan de Leon 10am-4pm	P1,600
	FLOWER SHOP FAVORITES by Mary Ann Ramirez 10am-4pm	P1,200
Feb 14(Thu.)	BASIC CAKES & CAKES FOR BEGINNERS by Chef Irene Villanueva 10am-4pm	P1,600
	QUICK CLASS by Chef Aurora Aurelio 10am-12noon	P1,000
Feb. 15(Tue.)	LET THERE THE KITCHEN BE by Pablo Lorenzo 10am-4pm	P1,600
	HAM I by Chef Ed Quimbo 10am-4pm	P1,600
Feb 16(Sat.)	FAST FABULOUS TREASURED RECIPES I by Chef Katherine Chan 10am-4pm	P1,600
Feb 17(Sun.)	IT'S BUFFALO JP by Chef Jose Luis Enriquez 10am-4pm	P1,600
	TUNA by Chef Ed Quimbo 10am	P1,600
Feb 18(Mon.)	GARDEN STATION by Pablo Lorenzo 10am-4pm	P1,600
	MINI CLASS I SWEET TREATS by Chef Lyn Chiongbian 10am-4pm	P1,000
Feb 19(Tue.)	BASIC CAKES & CAKES FOR BEGINNERS by Mary Grace 10am-4:30pm	P1,600
	DESSERTS I LOVE by Mary Grace 2-6pm	
	MINI CLASS I 10 TIPS OF SUCCESS AMONG AMATEUR BAKERS by Lyn de Leon 2pm-4pm	P1,000
Feb 20(Wed.)	STEAKS AND RIBS GRILLING AND ROASTING WORKSHOP PART I by Chef Tony de Jesus 10am-4pm	P1,600
	MINI CLASS I SHARKS FIN SOUP by Chef Katherine Chan 10am-4pm	P1,000
	MINI CLASS I BASICS OF CHINESE COOKING by Chef Lyn Chiongbian 10am-4pm	P1,000
Feb 21(Thu.)	BREAKFAST & BRUNCH COOKERY by Chef Katherine Chan 10am-4pm	P1,600
	TAPAS Party Style for Cocktails 2-6pm by Chef Lyn Chiongbian 10am-4pm	P1,600
Feb 22(Fri.)	SUSHI & SASHIMI WORKSHOP by Chef Katherine Chan 10am-4pm	P1,600
Feb 23(Sat.)	BREAKFAST & BRUNCH COOKERY by Chef Irene Zialcita 10am-4pm	P1,600
	TAPAS Party Style for Cocktails 2-6pm by Chef Lyn Chiongbian 10am-4pm	P1,600
Feb 24(Sun.)	CHINESE by Chef Antonette Arao 10am-4pm	P1,600
Feb 25(Mon.)	JAPANESE HEALTHY FOOD by Chef Aurora Aurelio 10am-4pm	P1,600
Feb 26(Tue.)	MINI CLASS I CHINESE 101 by Mary Grace 9-12pm	P1,000
	CHINESE by Chef Irene Zialcita 10am-4pm	P1,600
	CHINESE SEAFOOD I by Chef Katherine Chan 10am-4pm	P1,600
Feb 27(Wed.)	JAPANESE COOKING by Chef Antonette Arao 10am-4pm	P1,600
	BASIC RESTAURANT KITCHEN LAYOUT AND DESIGN by Ate Vicenzo 10:30am	P1,750
	HEALTHY GOURMET - SOUTH BEACH DIET PHASE I by Jacqueline H. Ortiz 10am-4pm	P1,600
	MINI CLASS I LADIES MEAL FOR ONE by Chef Ed Quimbo 10am-4pm	P1,000
	MINI CLASS I LADIES MEAL FOR ONE by Chef Ed Quimbo 10am-4pm	P1,000
Feb 28(Thu.)	MINI CLASS I BARBECUE, GRILL AND ROAST WORKSHOP PART I by Chef Dan de Leon 10am-4pm	P1,600
	MINI CLASS I CHINESE NOODLES WITH MINI A BUFFET LUNCH/DINNER by Mary Grace 9-12pm	
Feb 29(Fri.)	MINI CLASS I MY OWN MINDANAO DISHES by Chef Wenjoy Mondejar 10am-4pm	P1,000
Mar 1(Sat.)	CHEESE TOUR DAY WITH MARRIERS by Chef Lyn Chiongbian 10am-4pm	P1,600
Mar 2(Sun.)	SALAD TOUR DAY WITH MARRIERS by Chef Lyn Chiongbian 10am-4pm	P1,600
Mar 3(Mon.)	BY FAVORITE DEMAND by Chef Jacqueline Ang-Po 10am-4pm	P1,600
	MINI CLASS I CHINESE 101 by Mary Grace 9-12pm	P1,000
Mar 4(Tue.)	MINI CLASS I MONGOLIAN COOKING by Chef Lyn Chiongbian 10am-4pm	P1,000
	DINNER GUARD by Chef Irene Zialcita 10am-4pm	P1,600
Mar 5(Wed.)	CHINESE NOODLES by Chef Katherine Chan 10am-4pm	P1,600
	MINI CLASS I BAR TAPPING AT ITS BEST by Pablo Lorenzo 10am-4pm	P1,600
Mar 6(Thu.)	BARBECUE I: EACH HAD AND GRILLED by Chef Dan de Leon 10am-4pm	P1,600
	MINI CLASS I CHINESE NOODLES by Mary Grace 9-12pm	P1,000
Mar 10 (Mon.)	CAKE DECORATING COURSE by Mary Grace 9am-4pm	P4,000
Mar 11(Tue.)	CHINESE NOODLES by Chef Irene Zialcita 10am-4pm	P1,600
Mar 12(Wed.)	CHINESE NOODLES I CAN by Chef Irene Zialcita 10am-4pm	P1,600
Mar 13(Thu.)	BARBECUE II: SEAFOOD AND VEGETABLES by Chef Dan de Leon 10am-4pm	P1,600
	HOME FOOD TO THE MAX by Jacqueline H. Ortiz 10am-4pm	P1,600
Mar 14 (Fri.)	CAKE DECORATING COURSE by Mary Grace 9am-4pm	P4,000
Mar 15(Sat.)	JAPANESE NOODLES by Chef Aurora Aurelio 10am-4pm	P1,600
Mar 16(Sun.)	CHINESE NOODLES by Chef Antonette Arao 10am-4pm	P1,600
Mar 17(Mon.)	BEST OF BUFFET by Chef Jose Luis Enriquez 10am-4pm	P1,600
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Mar 19,20,21(W,Th,F)	BASIC CULINARY ARTS COURSE by Chef Dan de Leon 10am-4pm	P19,000
Mar 19(Wed.)	HEALTHY FOOD IDEA I by Jacqueline H. Ortiz 10am-4pm	P1,600
	MINI CLASS I ICE CREAM AND NOODLES by Jacqueline H. Ortiz 10am-4pm	P1,600
Mar 20(Thu.)	KOREAN COOKING I by Chef Cecilia Reyes 10am-4pm	P1,600
Mar 21(Fri.)	SWEET BUT SUGAR FREE CAKES I by Chef Jacqueline Ang-Po 10am-4pm	P1,600
Mar 22(Sat.)	JAPANESE SKILLS BY ANA MONTENEGRO by Chef Aurora Aurelio 10am-4pm	P1,600

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ENTERTAINMENT

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DID YOU KNOW...

Kim Alonzo and John Lloyd Cruz

RP's top 4 last year

WHO ARE ANNOUNCED ON TUESDAY that its 2008 issue included RP's 2 top-grossing films last year. Banking source was Box Office Mojo, the Net's most comprehensive box-office database. The top 5 – "Spider-Man 3," "Transformers," and "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix." to 4th slot is ... Star Cinema's "One More Chance," starring John Lloyd Cruz and Bea Alonzo!

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OGIE Alcasid can be heavy

WYNGARD Tracy is really frank

JOLINA Magbanua won't be swayed

Here come the judges

'Pinoy Idol' trio say they won't be Simon, Paula and Randy clones

By Bayani San Diego Jr.

DURING THE FIRST HOUSING OF auditions for GMA-7's "Pinoy Idol" in Cagayan de Oro last week, Jolina Magdangal cried, Ogie Alcasid picked up a chow of brasone, and Wyngard Tracy insisted that he would soon become the most hated man in the country.

Jolina, Ogie and Wyngard are the judges for the local version of the world-famous reality talent search from Fremantlemedia.

In an exclusive interview, Wilma Galvante, GMA-7 senior VP for Entertainment TV, pointed out that the judges' "love-pooped" role was very important: "They tell the contestant whether they're good or not, and they influence the viewers' vote."

Credibility

For this reason, Fremantle had put a premium on credibility in choosing the three judges from a list presented by the Kapuso network.

Another crucial consideration was whether prospective judges were willing to devote the next eight months to "Idol," which premieres in April and wraps up in August.

"I wanted Miguel Regino Manzano to be a judge, but she's doing a series of concerts in the US," Galvante said. "Jolina grew up on afternoon soap."

The final Idol title is a matter even Galvante pretend not.

WILMA Galvante

"As an artist and record promoter, Wyngard represents the hardcore side of the industry," Galvante explained. "As singer-songwriter-producer, Ogie represents talent."

Galvante predicted that Magbanua, as the "creature of pretty," would be a no-challenge. "She's gonna [steal] kids' look up to her. Hopefully they will listen if she says singing is not for them."

Surprise

Tracy agreed with Galvante: "I really regarded her as the metaphysician from Ang TV but she surprised me in Cagayan de Oro."

Magbanua herself said that the finals were she'd spend her stress, that she would not to be swayed by her fellow judges. "I shouldn't feel intimidated, though Wyngard and Ogie are more experienced than I am."

Alcasid has his own fashion concern: "Wyngard's hair is very straight-forward," Galvante said.

"I'm my hair to be neutral," Tracy admitted, "but that's not me."

If Tracy is being more as the local version of Simon "Mr. Pimp" Cowell and Magbanua's sparsely cheer leader Paula Abdul, Alcasid acknowledged that he could very well end up as Dog Pound King Randy Jackson.

"But the Fremantle consultants signed an not to portray any role... and just be ourselves," Alcasid said.

"I don't want to imitate anyone," Magbanua answered.

According to Galvante, Fremantle consultant Bob Cassotta sat down with the trio, along with host Raymond Gutierrez, prior to the Cagayan de Oro auditions, as opposed on the "Idol" production schedule.

"I've always been brutally honest," Tracy stated. "If I express an opinion, I stand by it no money-value."

"It's not an easy job. After the 600th time I said no [to a contestant], I felt drained," Alcasid admitted.

"I've met about a hundred-t auditions in Cagayan de Oro," Tracy recounted. "On the first day we started at 1 p.m. and ended at 1 a.m."

"But it's a great learning experience," Alcasid said. "I've been [to judges] not just because I'm an expert – I'm also here to learn from my fellow judges and from the contestants as well."

Tearful scene

Magbanua was reduced to tears in Cagayan de Oro.

"A girl came in with her mom, who was walking with a cane," Magbanua recalled. "I suddenly remembered my own audition for Jhyan Cayabyab's youth group. I 4K when I was 11. I went through the same thing. I also started from scratch."

Dear stop for the "Idol" team is Batangas this week; Iloilo, next week; and then Cebu, Davao, Metro Manila, Dagupan, Clark, and Baguio in succeeding weeks.

Top Tomato goes to 'Once,' 'Ratatouille'

NEW YORK—"RATATOUILLE" AND "Once" warmed the hearts of moviegoers and critics alike—and now, they have taken top honors in the 9th Annual Golden Tomato Awards.

The sweetly pro tribute to the hand-crowned films of the previous year as determined by the '90s site RottenTomatoes.com, which compiles reviews from print, online and broadcast film critics to measure the percentage of favorable critiques.

"Ratatouille," the animated gem about a rat with unexpected culinary skills, earned a 96 percent ranking on the site's Tomatometer. The Irish romance "Once," which won for Best Limited Release With and Best Musical, scored 98 percent.

"Ratatouille" scored the Golden Tomato for Romance. "The Reserve Ultimatum" went to the Action/Adventure category. "Juno" won the Best Comedy and "I'm Gonna Go Old Now" the best Thriller.

"Away From Her" was named Best Drama, "Sicko" won Best Documentary and "Cannibalman" was the top horror flick. "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix" took a Tomato for Science Fiction/Fantasy and "Enchanted" won Best Family Film. "The Lives of Others," from Germany was the Top Foreign Language Film.

The Moldy Tomato — awarded to the worst-reviewed film of the year — was thrown up "Invasion I Said So," 29

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'Soprano' trend, all-new 'Big Love'

"SPIDER-MAN 3," "HARRY Potter and the Order of the Phoenix" and "Memoirs of a Geisha" are among the Hollywood blockbusters in HBO Asia's lineup this year.

Other titles on the "Sneaks" and "Premiere" telegrams, "300," "Awakenings" and "The Pursuit of Happyness." Coming in February are "Happy Feet" (2), "Meridian" (10), "The Prestige" (17), "Blood Diamond" (24).

There were announced by Caroline Shing, HBO Asia director for Marketing Communications on Tuesday. "Grocery preview of the 10 top 100 box-office hits from 2007 will premiere on HBO," Wong said.

She also announced that Showtime's finest of the "hits" is "The Sopranos," with the movie channel bringing to all its seasons, 11 p.m. Monday starting Feb. 4.

Likewise forthcoming on new season of "Entourage" in May and "Big Love" in November.

Shing urged viewers as well to watch out for "groundbreaking" entertainment on HBO Family, HBO Hits, Cinemax and HBO Signature.

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GALLERIA

1 NATIONAL TREASURE 2 - THE	6 I AM LEGEND
2 AMERICAN GANGSTER	7 DRAGON WAR
3 P.S. I LOVE YOU	8 Indistinct: CONDO
4 ALVIN and the CHIPMUNKS	9 SWEENEY TODD
5 ALIEN vs. PREDATOR 2	10 THE HEARTBREAK KID

ERMITA

1 ALIEN vs. PREDATOR 2	6 AMERICAN GANGSTER
2 Indistinct: SWEL	7 SWEENEY TODD
3 THE HEARTBREAK KID	8 I AM LEGEND
4 ALVIN and the CHIPMUNKS	9 P.S. I LOVE YOU
5 DRAGON WAR	10 NATIONAL TREASURE 2

METRO EAST

1 AMERICAN GANGSTER	5 ALVIN and the CHIPMUNKS
2 DRAGON WAR	6 SWEENEY TODD
3 ALIEN vs. PREDATOR 2	7 NATIONAL TREASURE 2
4 P.S. I LOVE YOU	8 I AM LEGEND

NOVALICHES

1 I AM LEGEND	5 NATIONAL TREASURE 2
2 ALIEN vs. PREDATOR	6 DRAGON WAR
3 AMERICAN GANGSTER	
4 SWEENEY TODD	

PIONEER

1 ALVIN and the CHIPMUNKS	3 P.S. I LOVE YOU
2 ALIEN vs. PREDATOR 2	4 AMERICAN GANGSTER

STA. ROSA

1 ALIEN vs. PREDATOR 2	
2 DESPERADOS	
3 I AM LEGEND	
4 NATIONAL TREASURE 2	

LIPA

1 BEE MOVIE	
2 NATIONAL TREASURE 2	
3 ELIZABETH	
4 HOOD OF HORROR	

DASMARINAS

1 ALIEN vs. PREDATOR 2	
2 NATIONAL TREASURE 2	
3 DESPERADOS	
4 I AM LEGEND	

IMUS

1 ALIEN vs. PREDATOR	
2 THE HEARTBREAK KID	
3 I AM LEGEND	
4 NATIONAL TREASURE 2	

ANGELES

1 ALIEN vs. PREDATOR 2	
2 NATIONAL TREASURE 2	
3 THE HEARTBREAK KID	
4 ALVIN and the CHIPMUNKS	

TARLAC

1 I AM LEGEND	
2 NATIONAL TREASURE 2	
3 DESPERADO	

STARMILLS

1 ALIEN vs. PREDATOR 2	4 NATIONAL TREASURE 2
2 ALVIN and the CHIPMUNKS	5 DESPERADOS
3 I AM LEGEND	6 THE HEARTBREAK KID

BACOLOD

1 ALIEN vs. PREDATOR 2	
2 NATIONAL TREASURE 2	
3 BEE MOVIE / I AM LEGEND	
4 DEATH PROOF	
5 THE HEARTBREAK KID	
6 CATACOMBS	

ILOILO

1 ALIEN vs. PREDATOR 2	
2 ELIZABETH	
3 NATIONAL TREASURE 2	
4 I AM LEGEND	
5 THE HEARTBREAK KID	
6 HOOD of HORROR	

Live Shows' 2-Day Film School in Manila

H'wood writers' strike a boon to AI

THE HOLLYWOOD WRITERS' strike may slowly be crippling the US entertainment industry, but it has benefited American teens snatched TV shows.

"American Idol" returned with four million viewers less than the 2005 season premiere.

Tuesday's debut was won by an estimated 33.2 million viewers, down 11 percent from the 37.4 million who watched the first show, according to preliminary ratings by Nielsen Media Research.

But still ranks as the most-watched show of the TV season, including sports. The last premiere was the 25.4 million pulled by the season premiere of "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation" on CBS on the hill.

Industry reports also said that "Idol" posted a record-high to advertising revenue.

Figures showed a big rate increase for commercials aired on the reality talent program. Thirty-second spots that cost $700,000 before the strike were reportedly snapped up for $900,000 for the Season 7 premiered last week.

According to the reports, ad buyers noted that, since the strike had stopped the production of dramas and comedies in major networks, "Idol"—aired by News Corp's Fox—was the biggest TV event in the moment.

A News Tech ad agency official was quoted as saying that "Idol" episodes, which run anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours, make about $10 million in ad sales for each hour. Fox pays licensing and royalty fees to CKX Inc., the company that owns the production credit of "Idol" concept creator Simon Fuller.

But there are signs years, News Corp. has been leading NBC, CBS and ABC in the fight for prime-time viewers ages 14-49, the "most sought" by advertisers.

The strike by the Writers Guild of America forced all the major networks to stop production of scripted shows and offer new reality shows that have yet to gain a loyal audience. *With a report from AP*

AT THE CINEMAS

GLORIETTA 1	1 AMERICAN GANGSTER	2 ALVIN VS. PREDATOR 2	3 THE HEARTBREAK KID	4 NATIONAL TREASURE: BOOK OF SECRETS		
GLORIETTA 4	1 NATIONAL TREASURE: BOOK OF SECRETS	2 P.S. I LOVE YOU	3 SWEENEY TODD			
	4 I AM LEGEND	5 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS	6 ALIEN VS. PREDATOR 2	7 SWEENEY TODD		
GREENBELT 1	1 AMERICAN GANGSTER	2 ALIEN VS. PREDATOR 2				
GREENBELT 3	1 AMERICAN GANGSTER	2 ALIEN VS. PREDATOR 2				
	3 P.S. I LOVE YOU	4 THE HEARTBREAK KID	5 NATIONAL TREASURE: BOOK OF SECRETS			
ALABANG TOWN CENTER	1 ALIEN VS. PREDATOR 2	2 AMERICAN GANGSTER				
	3 P.S. I LOVE YOU	4 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS	5 NATIONAL TREASURE: BOOK OF SECRETS			
AYALA CENTER CEBU	1 ALIEN VS. PREDATOR 2	2 AMERICAN GANGSTER	3 I SHALL NEVER BE YOUR WOMAN	4 NATIONAL TREASURE: BOOK OF SECRETS		
MARKET! MARKET!	1 ALIEN VS. PREDATOR 2	2 AMERICAN GANGSTER				
	3 P.S. I LOVE YOU	4 NATIONAL TREASURE: BOOK OF SECRETS	5 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS			
TRINOMA	1 NATIONAL TREASURE: BOOK OF SECRETS	2 SWEENEY TODD	3 AMERICAN GANGSTER	4 P.S. I LOVE YOU		
	5 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS	6 I AM LEGEND	7 ALIEN VS. PREDATOR 2			

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Concepts Sudoku By Dave Grose

3			8			5	6	9
				9		4		
	4		1			8		
					6		5	
				7				
	7		9					
		5			8		1	
		4		6				
2	9	6			3			8

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3	5	7	2	6	1	8	9	4
1	9	6	5	9	4	7	2	3
9	7	8	6	4	2	3	5	1
2	1	3	8	5	9	6	4	7
5	6	4	1	7	3	9	8	2
7	8	9	4	3	6	2	1	5
6	4	1	7	2	8	5	3	9
8	3	2	9	1	5	4	7	6

Theatrics and love for the macabre

By Pocholo Concepcion

FOR ALL ITS NOISY SOUND AND FURY, My Chemical Romance's band wisely watching tomorrow night at the Mall Beatrix Open Field?

Rida are bound to bullet, "Yes!". "Of course!" "Absolutely our type of music!

What is it about MCR or My Chem that sends young fans into fits of frenzy as soon as the band crashes it up?

First, the look. For those whose introduction to the group came by way of its third and latest album, "Welcome to the Black Parade" (Warner), there's no mistaking that MCR knows the value of visual impact. The CD cover that features the graphic illustration of a corpse dressed as a marching band major is only a teaser of what's inside. Brothers Gerard and Mikey Way (vocals and bass, respectively), Ray Toro (guitar) Frank Iero (guitar) and Bob Bryar (drums) are photographed in similar marching band uniforms, but with severed creepy characters hovering around.

It's an indication of the band's love for theatrics and sense of the macabre.

Those would find expression in the music. Many of the tracks in "Black Parade" start off like preludes in theater musicals, where characters speak dialogues in singsong manner. In MCR's case, the stage progress into frenetic rants against the futility of life.

Littered with spite

If that sounds like punk nihilism, how else describe those song titles? "The End," "Dead!," "This Is How I Disappear" and "Disenchanted."

But though their lyrics are littered with spite, they're actually written like pessimists with a touch of dark humor. It's as if the band members, who share songwriting credits, get the most fun from playing around with the misery of similar circumstances that bound the world in general.

The peak of this presentation is heard in "Dance" (featuring Lisa Miscik on guest vocals), in which the speaker treats his mother like his mobo and they're both going to hell. Yes, even in a child-on-a-hospital rant with the same chorus taken from the title track ("We all carry on..."), the irony is not lost ("Raise your glass for tomorrow we die...").

However, "Cancer" is one song that reveals frailty and a vulnerable streak. "Cancer the hardest part of life is hearing you..."

Whether the band really means what it sings about is beside the point. Because listening to the music, with its raucous blend of punk and Queen-style rock opera (but with lots of tongue-in-cheek humor), it's easy to understand why MCR is such a like-able group.

With themes of violence, death and life's absurdity becoming classic fare in pop culture, it wouldn't seem unpleasant to watch MCR in concert and the movie, "Sweeney Todd," the new day.

... make My Chemical Romance a hot band, curiously

The 'Razzies'

LOS ANGELES...LINDSAY LOHAN ("I KNOW WHO KILLED ME" and Eddie Murphy ("Norbit") lead "Golden Raspberry" awards nominations for Howard's worst movie performances in 2007. AFP

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FEEDBACK

Willie's Ferrari

From Gilbert Kahoon, California (kahoon@aol.com):

When I first heard the news about the Presidential Anti-Smuggling Group's confiscation (last TV) our Willie Revillame issued down cheeks for a Ferrari allegedly smuggled into the country, I was impressed with the efficient work of the PAGG. It seemed then that it was doing its work daily. But after watching TPG, I got the impression that Revillame was able to talk his way out of the illegal situation.

The PAGG has already demonstrated its capacity to confiscate the car. It's inconceivable for anyone to simply say "I am not aware, therefore I am innocent". What was happened to the motto, "Ignorance of the law does not excuse anyone, not even celebrities"?

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Heroism is not a thing of the past

By Oliver M. Palomaria
Contributor

IF BIG-SCREEN JALAPENOS IS YOUR CUP of tea, you have good reason to catch this post-apocalyptic Will Smith-a-thon, still in theaters after two weeks.

"I am Legend" is set to a big ghost town (set in New York, Midtown scientist Robert Neville (Will Smith) and his dog scrounge around city to find food and supplies. Two years prior, a virus engineered to cure cancer had mutated—and devolved people into nocturnal savages. Robert keeps the zombie-like monsters unaware of his existence, while cautiously sending SOS messages out for hopes, an old-world—survivors.

It's a well-shot, well-designed movie. Gut-curling, concrete and metal structures outright with (attended) greenery, the emptiness of the vast, manic skyline creating a doomsday mood.

Robert, manages to ill environmental activities—grilling, or "borrowing" DVDs from a neighborhood shop—into his routine. He's very post-thinking, and has coped surprisingly because he's resourceful, cunning, and has no trifling grow of humor.

The creatures (seen like the torturers of "28 Days Later" and "30 Days of Night," but are frightening in their own way (coincidentally, the spectral effects give them a rubbery texture. But it's parts where they're required to be threatening, they do suffice.

Shortcuts

The story outcomes that humans could a thing of the past, even now that the human race already seems on the verge of self-destruction. The science fiction elements provide a good premise. As a horror film, "I Am Legend" uses worn-out visual shortcuts, reminiscent of tech-stopper from such films as "Alien" and "Blair Witch Project." Still, the photography and editing help create tension at the right moments.

Smith pulls off his solitary survivor shtick with flair. It's understandable when his character goes nuts when faced with the possibility that his "husband" smashes may be unsafe. Thus, faced with the possibility of rejoining an unknown humans, his character regresses uncertainty by concocting lines from "Monk," of all things. That scene is quite effective.

The ending could have been better executed, but the ultimate payoff is still rewarding.

FROM THE GUY WHO BROUGHT YOU
"THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY"
BEN STILLER
THE HEARTBREAK KID
2ND WEEK

...even now that the human race seems on the verge of self-destruction